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# THE APPLE OF CONCORD

RICHARD CHURCH IS THE AUTHOR OF

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*The Novels*

OLIVER'S DAUGHTER

HIGH SUMMER

THE PRODIGAL FATHER

*And the Books of Poems*

THE GLANCE BACKWARD

MOOD WITHOUT MEASURE

NEWS FROM THE MOUNTAIN

RICHARD CHURCH

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*The*  
**APPLE OF CONCORD**

*A Novel*



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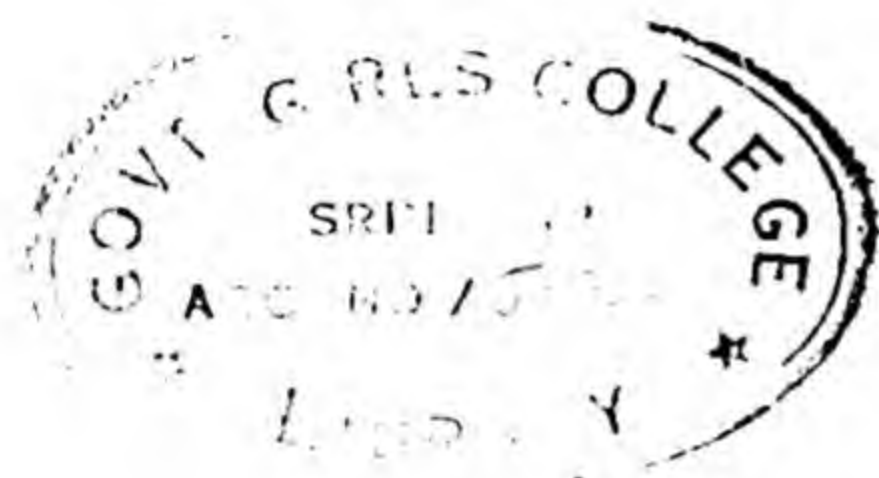
TO  
THE MEMORY OF  
NOËL SCHIMMER  
WHO WOULD NOT GROW OLD



‘Everything that counts is veiled.’

*Paul Valéry.*





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## PART I. ACCIDIE



## CHAPTER I

### TURNING A SERE LEAF

GREGORY WADE stood at the stern of the cross-channel boat, gazing grimly at the receding cliffs of Dover. The fresh wind rubbed in the brim of his hat, and from time to time he unconsciously put up a thin hand to prevent the disturbance. He was too abstracted to be annoyed by the failure. Even when the wind grew more boisterous, wrenching at his spectacles and flinging out the skirts of his overcoat, he seemed to be oblivious of the good-natured overtures. He was fascinated by something that his mind saw beyond the cliffs. He stood under the spell of this reconstruction, the cliffs that symbolized it sinking lower and lower in the vault of the sky. As they dwindled, so his vision became less tangible, until at last he turned with a sigh of perplexity from the thin streak of vapourish grey. That mere pencil of shade upon the base of the blue dome where the dazzling clouds sailed with such solidity, could not possibly represent the scenes he was leaving; the places, the people, the hopes and efforts, and the failures. The failures. Even these last were unreal. Their mark upon him; the pallid flesh, the greyness of spirit, the unaccountable stupor that lay over his

frozen mind; even these had little significance under the touch of the impersonal wind and the salt tang of the foam.

He pulled his hat down over his ears, fumbled in his pocket for a loose cigarette, and decided that it was impossible to smoke. A passenger near him seemed to be threatening to speak, and he moved away discreetly, to lean over the rail and look down at the pile of trunks and mail-bags. He stared at a new Daimler saloon car, and reflected bitterly that he was accompanying it, one of the two recent acquisitions of his prospective employer. A new car and a new secretary; the one immaculate and the other badly scarred and chipped. What bad taste the man must have, not to find a secretary to match the car; a royal blue secretary with chromium-plated fittings. A chromium-plated soul, and a brain with a selective gear!

Further comparisons were interrupted by the approach of the mechanic who was in charge of the car. The man had driven Wade from London to Dover, and the two therefore had some slight acquaintance. 'She's lashed up all right, I think,' said the mechanic, uneasy about his child. 'Yes, she's not likely to start bucking,' Wade answered. He did not want to talk, but there was no way to avoid it. The fellow was one of his own generation, the war generation. They had already discovered that they had done similar service in France, Wade as a liaison officer and the man as an interpreter attached to the Engineers. Perhaps that

explained why they were here now; selected for their jobs because they spoke French fluently in addition to their several other necessary qualifications. Wade asked himself, again with a touch of bitterness, what his own qualifications were, and he decided that they consisted in an ability to raise false hopes in other people; hopes that he seemed fated never to fulfil. Why was that? Because the world was awry; because he had returned to a peace-time world whose shape and gravitation were changed; because war had taken him too young and twisted the pliant sapling? Or, because one or two other people, for reasons or unreasons that he had not yet unravelled, had tortured and betrayed him?

This last inquiry still had power to pain him, and he stared a little more grimly at the noble piece of machinery below, and followed with even more sense of weary unreality the war-time reminiscences of his companion. The past; the war, and the decaying years after it; was that an idle story now? He saw it as a book, in which the Channel breeze now played, derisively flicking over page after page.

## CHAPTER II

## ALMOST A SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY

AFTER tedious formalities with the Customs at Calais, the car was at last released, re-charged with petrol, and handed over to Wilson, the mechanic. Two hours of nervous chain-smoking had made him pale, and Wade suggested having a good meal before they set off for Paris.

'It 'll be my farewell feast to England,' he said, 'so let us find the best place.'

Wilson glanced at him shrewdly, and drove the car at walking-pace through the town, looking to right and left at the restaurants, and referring them, by a sort of semi-inclusive nod, for Wade to make the choice. 'This 'll do, don't you think?' said the latter. With another nod Wilson agreed, and after walking round the Daimler once more to satisfy himself that all was well, he followed Wade, who had chosen a table on the pavement, in a corner made by the glass screen and the usual tubs of privet.

The easy relationship at once became constrained. Wilson withdrew his chair an unnecessary inch from the table, and sat half turned away at an angle, apologetic and shy.

'Damn it, Wilson! Make yourself at home!' said Wade sharply, irritated by the mutual embarrassment. Wilson responded at once, drew his chair in, and leaned confidentially over the table.

'Did you notice that funny little 'bus just in front of us?' he asked. Wade had not. 'It's a pre-war Renault, I should think.' Wilson paused, his face-play directing Wade to a young couple who were finishing their meal in great haste, the girl meanwhile talking in a rapid undertone. Her deep broken voice trembled either with anger or anxiety. The man was bored but polite. Trying to pacify her by an occasional monosyllable, he ate expertly, with perfect manners that appeared only to add to his partner's impatience.

'It belongs to them,' said Wilson. 'Some people have no pride!'

'Perhaps they've got no money!' Wade suggested, passing him the menu. 'In that case, I sympathize with their bad taste!'

'Well, I don't know,' said Wilson, with an air of mystery. 'There's more in it than that.'

Wade was too tired and indifferent to tackle this subtle lead, and he was glad to escape by ordering the food and wine. They had not long begun to eat when the young couple rose. Wilson glanced stealthily over his shoulder, and his action forced Wade also to a mild interest. The girl was ordinary, almost plain, but with a graceful figure. She walked with a slight exaggeration, like a mannequin. She wore her cheap clothes well, and when she put on the new and expensive coat which her companion held, her exit was quite successful. Even so, Wade was not interested. His attention was fixed on the man. In spite of the fact that the

little fellow had drawn on a leather racing-hat with ear-flaps, and stood flicking himself with a pair of large gauntlets, he gave a sense of quietness and dignity to everything round him. He even enriched his lady with these rare qualities. Wade noticed particularly a pair of quick-darting brown eyes, that in spite of their activity seemed consciously to refuse to observe anything. His untidy hair was now hidden, except for a stray lock that created perhaps a slightly feminine effect; so slight as immediately to be effaced by the quietness and independence of the whole man.

Wade was amused to find his mind engaged for so long. He had thought that such an activity was now impossible in his moon-lava world, a death-scape of extinct life, craters of frozen feelings. He was grateful to anything or anybody who could thus stimulate him, even for a few moments. That little hesitant, yet proud figure, hovering between the table and the door, watching with bored but anxious eyes the tall girl who was stepping into the decrepit car, surely he must be something more than the ordinary Parisian returning from a week-end amour.

Wilson had half risen from his chair, balancing himself with his finger-tips on the table while he tried to peer over the boxes of privet and also to remain unobserved.

'Their old engine's gone cold,' he said; then, after some minutes of amusement and bobbing up and down while much cranking and voluble conversation took place outside, he added: 'The girl's

getting fed up. Got to get back to her job, I expect. Bit early in the day to start worrying about that, though.' More mechanical noises and expostulations. By peering under the thicket of the bushes Wade also could watch the proceedings. The little man was now struggling with the bonnet of the car. The catch evidently was weathered in, for he could not move it. After much struggling, during which the girl got out and tried to push him aside and do the job herself, he succeeded only in grazing his hand against the hinge of a lamp. The girl thereupon transferred her attention, and attempted to tie up the hand with his handkerchief.

His patience, however, was exhausted. With a touch of temper he snatched his hand away and came hurrying back. He stopped near the Englishmen's table, and suddenly plunged into speech, addressing himself in English to Wade, who rose politely.

'Excuse me, sir. I am in trouble. It is imperative for me to be in Amiens this evening, and my automobile refuses! My—my *waif* is miserable about it. I should be honoured if your chauffeur could be asked to make the machine—er—go!'

'It is a pleasure,' Wade replied in French, successfully removing all traces of amusement. 'Wilson, will you—er—?' Wilson deliberately winked. Whether this implied a silent comment on the dilemma of the French couple, their car, and their obviously embarrassing relationship, or on the

assumed position of Wade and himself as master and man, his fellow-traveller could not decide. Wilson rose at once and went out to the obstinate car, leaving Wade to entertain the Frenchman.

Finding that Wade spoke French fluently, the little man at once became less formal. He explained that he had been for a little holiday with 'his friend,' and that she had to be back in Paris to start work on the morrow, Monday, morning. He intended to send her on by train from Amiens, because there he was to pick up his brother, who had been fishing. And his brother was a very punctual business man who hated to be kept waiting. Wade sympathized, and assured monsieur that the mechanic was a genius with engines, and would put the Renault right in a few moments. A look of almost sentimental happiness shone like oil in monsieur's brown eyes. 'I am more grateful than I can say,' he said. 'My—my friend is so worried by the delay. Perhaps you have noticed?' Oh, no, Wade assured him. But the Frenchman was sensitive, and must take pains to prove that there had been no quarrel, or even argument, between himself and the lady. 'She is terribly worried,' he emphasized, no longer concerned to keep up the pretence that she was his 'waif,' as he had called her in his broken but fluent English. He could say no more, for the girl now ran back, grasped him by the arm, and with an inclusive gesture to Wade, cried: 'He says it will never go, the mechanic. What are we to do? You under-

stand, monsieur, he has to take his brother from Amiens, and I am so afraid that he will be late, for his brother is ferocious—ferocious! I do not mind for myself; but if he is bad friends with his brother it will be terrible. You see, monsieur, his brother is very rich, and is about to help——’

Her companion silenced her by putting a small plump hand over her mouth.

‘Be quiet, Yvonne,’ he said, with dignity. ‘I have already explained.’

‘Yes, I fully understand,’ said Wade, surprised to find that he was enjoying the comedy. ‘Will you meanwhile take a cognac while I finish my lunch? Wilson—*that* is Wilson,’ with a wave of his hand toward the road, ‘will surely put you right in a moment, and we can then pursue our way to Paris. We shall soon make up the time in that new car!’

‘Ah, monsieur!’ said the girl with admiration. ‘You are English!’ implying vast wealth. He smiled modestly, and was about to enlarge upon the conceit, when the Renault suddenly spluttered into life, settling, after a few roaring accelerations, into a steady drone.

Both the fugitives from joy registered their satisfaction by shaking Wade’s hand and sitting down at the next table. Wilson returning at that moment, they embraced him also, and called for a bottle of best Burgundy. After a solemn toast, the Frenchman presented his card to Wade, seized the girl by the hand, and hurried her away. She

looked back, and cried above the privet tubs: 'Au revoir, gentlemen, we shall meet again, who knows?'

The Englishmen remained standing, apprehensive during the cautious departure of the Renault. But all went well, and gradually the noise died away as the car climbed out of the town. Then Wilson returned to his meal, eating in silence until his appetite was appeased. After a long drink of red wine, he looked up at Wade and grinned.

'Some fellows have all the luck, sir,' he said. 'A nice little party, that. She was worried to death about him. Might have been his wife. But these French girls are like that; always thinking and working for their men. Nice and old-fashioned I call it. She says his brother is going to set him up in a little hotel. He's one of the old régime, according to her; a younger son, and broke to the world. She's mortally afraid of this brother. That's why she didn't want her boy to be late at Amiens.'

'That's amusing,' said Wade, laughing. 'He told me a different tale. He was all anxiety for *her*, in case she should not be back in time to-morrow morning, and lose her job. I suppose she works in one of the big stores.'

'Yes, and keeps her little brothers and sisters. Oh, well, good luck to her—she's a peach. But I'm doubtful about the magneto. It's ignition trouble—though really the whole outfit is dying of old age.'

They sat for another half-hour, finishing their

wine, and enjoying French coffee and Marylands. They chatted about the war, warmed, perhaps, by the memory-evoking perfume of the tobacco. The intervening years lay islanded to the north, complete and isolate in their own bitterness. Wade did not look that way. For once he was facing the sun, and the red wine of Burgundy was glowing in his veins. Desolation and cynical weariness, those familiars of his disillusioned life, had turned their heads aside from this scene of innocence, which had made him forget himself and lose his cares in laughter. He was almost grateful.

But Wilson, the good Samaritan, was not so comfortably repaid; for when he went out to the proud and shining Daimler, it refused to start. And it persisted in its maiden obstinacy for two long hours, during which Wilson got dirtier and dirtier, and more and more ashamed of himself. Wade was so sorry for him that he wandered off into the town, did a little sight-seeing, and came back at about five in the evening laden with bags of fruit for consumption on the journey. He found Wilson waiting for him, spick and span and proud of his conquest.

'Ignition trouble, too!' he grinned. 'That comes of showing off with a new car. Unless it's a sort of measles that she caught from the other little fellow!' Then holding out his hand, he added: 'Here, sir, you dropped this gentleman's card.'

Wade took it, wondering why he had not examined it earlier. Too bored, perhaps, to pursue

the tiny adventure to its conclusion. A feather in the wind—what wind? Some dry sirocco of the soul. No matter; not worth depressing oneself further. He looked at the card in his hand, and read:

CHARLES DE VAUDRAC  
74 rue Aumont-Thiéville

Paris 17<sup>e</sup>

## CHAPTER III

### RAIN THAT MIGHT BE ALLEGORICAL

TIME and space passed without further incident. A riotous September sunset flashed over the wind-screen, causing Wilson to pull his peaked cap so low over his eyes that it almost met the tip of his cigarette. Wade stared moodily at the opaque sheet of flaming Triplex, reading thereon an oracle of nothingness. He was being carried to a new chapter in this meaningless book of his career. He recognized that fact by means of his body, which swayed and bumped upon the seat like a sack of cement.

He tried to convince himself that he was interested in what lay before him: the return to France, the new employment, the fresh contacts. But he failed, and turned his mind to the scenes he had left, testing it with the probe of pain, for some sign of

sensibility. But again he failed. Nothing. Nothing to feel or not to feel. Nothing to believe or disbelieve. He could not even prove to himself that he did not care. Nor could he convince himself that there was a cause of this inanity. Certainly it was not justified by events. Repeated failures, repeated minor betrayals, and one deep and heart-searing treachery: these were common enough experiences, and most people survived them. Indeed, the Micawber-kind thrives on them, turning the mangle and wringing out fresh hopes and ever-new confidence from the squalor of defeat and disappointment.

Wade was conscious of his companion, who drove steadily, a glint of settled pleasure in his eyes. The sulky passenger almost resented the occasional quick glances of inquiry, nearly imperceptible, yet sufficient to suggest sympathy for something not understood.

'There's fags in my left-hand pocket,' said Wilson at last, after an hour's silence; and the tone of his voice forced Wade to respond, though unwillingly. He found a couple of cigarettes, put one between Wilson's lips, for the first time noticing a scar that cut across from the thin nostril to the edge of the mouth. Why had he not seen that before? Good God, what a lack of contact! And he had once prided himself on his observation; indeed, it had been this quality which made him such a good officer during the war. But one was younger then. Clouds of time were settling. Perhaps,

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after all, this was the source of the trouble; not circumstance, not the cruelty of events, but something still more humiliating, the mere passage of time that modelled away the features of life, effacing the individual, changing men and women to stocks and stones.

Wilson slowed up as Wade lit the cigarettes, and the relaxation from speed enabled the landscape to make its effect. The time of day, the tremendous happenings in the sky where the pageant of silent colour was piling and passing, the evening mood of the two men, brought some sort of quality even into the plains of northern France. The treeless small-holdings, little patches of oats, rhubarb, beet-root; squalid box-shaped houses in streaky green, white, or pink, an occasional church tumbling into decay; all these objects that normally would depress the passer-by were now charged with a Millet-like quality of subdued fire and significance.

Even the automobile-intoxicated Wilson was impressed.

'What a night!' he said; 'I wish I could paint a picture of it! Reminds me of No Man's Land when the guns were quiet. You remember that? The weird effect of that silence? Sometimes it got me down more than the hellish row itself! Makes me feel religious. It's as though everything—I don't mean people—tries to remind you of something you've forgotten.'

Wade saw the scar over Wilson's mouth twitch, and he realized that this almost imperceptible

disfigurement was the cause of the man's general expression of whimsicality. It was a trick of the skin, and no index of the spirit. What a deception! And what a stupid and malicious trick of fate, putting this pretty lie upon the man's personality!

'You know Leonardo da Vinci?' he asked. 'A great pioneer in your profession. Invented, or tried to invent, a flying machine. Did a lot in hydraulics, too. He was impressed like you, and said that the early evening light brought men's souls into their eyes. He advised artists always to paint portraits at six o'clock in the evening.'

This relaxation from Wade warmed Wilson to further conversation, and the men chatted contentedly while the great car rushed toward the southwest after the falling glories of the sunset, like a dog chasing the moon. As darkness fell, the necessity for conversation increased, and for an hour or two neither was at a loss for sufficient reminiscences to keep the talk alive.

Although fortified with the fruit and cakes which Wade bought in Boulogne, they found that by eight o'clock the combination of hunger and jolting made them both travel-faint. They stopped to take supper—cabbage-soup and veal—in a grubby little village near Amiens. When they reached the town rain was falling, and all they saw was a slate-coloured blur of buildings and melting lights. The streets were empty and Wilson lost no time in threading his way through them. Out on the open road again, he put on speed, his headlights like dragons

sucking up the rain. The effect of this monotonous inrush of silver made Wade sleepy, and gradually his share of the comradely talk diminished, ceasing at last as his eyes closed in sleep, thus protecting themselves from the sickening sameness of the rain-pattern swerving into the lamps.

Sunk into this mobile oblivion, he was roused to some kind of consciousness by a change in the rhythm of the engine. He blinked, failed to open his eyes, blinked again, and at last awoke into a mood of unspeakable depression.

'What 's the matter?' he growled, too angry with the universe even to peer ahead of himself. With eyes shut again, he heard Wilson reply.

'Somebody in trouble here, I think. But it 's raining like hell. Can you look out your side, sir, and see what 's the matter?'

Wade then realized that the Daimler had stopped. Lowering the window, he saw through a curtain of rain that two men were standing outside, and behind them a small car whose lights were extinguished.

The shorter of the men approached, and Wade saw, by the back-cast glow from the lamps, that he was the young Frenchman whom Wilson had assisted at Boulogne. Rain streamed from him, and his gleaming helmet and diminutive figure gave him the appearance of a tadpole.

'More trouble?' said Wade, rapidly seeking in his memory for the name on the visiting card that now lay in his wallet. The little man was in such

a desperate state, however, that he could not articulate. Wade saw his mouth open and close several times in the effort. At last in despair he buried his face in his grimy hands. This weakness stirred the second man to action. Stepping forward from obscurity, he pushed his companion aside with a gesture of impatience. Wade could distinguish little except a figure of considerable bulk under a wideawake hat whose soaked brim dropped so much that the face beneath was hidden.

'P . . . pardon, m . . . monsieur,' he stuttered. 'But I have an appointment in Paris to-night, and this beast will not move.' He waved an arm; the gesture including both the car and its driver. 'My brother was already late in picking me up at Amiens! And now! Now! Tch!' Contempt and disgust silenced him, and before he could speak again his brother found a voice, and put a restraining hand on his arm. The scene was comical enough; and the explosive anger of the one, with the other's effort at restraint, were made more ludicrous by the wet. The sleek gleaming figures were hardly human!

'You were so good, monsieur,' said the smaller seal, lifting a fin in supplication. 'You see my brother. It was so imperative! But I can do no more!'

Wade, who was wearing a mackintosh outside his overcoat, did not hesitate to plunge into the deluge. Again, and unwillingly, he found himself attracted by the little Frenchman. He wanted to reassure

him, to protect him from this brother who so obviously was the dominating elder.

'I hope the——' he began, intending to inquire after the companion who was to have taken train at Amiens. But he was arrested by a spasm of alarm that flashed across the brown eyes.

'No! No!' said the man, whose quick intelligence anticipated Wade's question. 'I can do nothing to it!' And he pointed with more than necessary emphasis at the silent Renault.

'You must let us take you on, gentlemen,' said Wade, who had caught the hint.

'But we are so wet.'

'Charles, you're a fool!' growled the brother. 'Wet or dry, we must get to Paris.'

'We might fix them up with a dry coat,' said Wilson, anxious about his upholstery; 'there's a cottage ahead where they could change.'

At this suggestion the brother's anger vanished, and with a courtesy that equalled the younger man's he thanked the Englishmen, took his companion by the arm, and spoke almost with solicitude: 'You'll catch pneumonia, idiot, standing gaping there. Come along, get the bags!' So saying, he stepped back to the Renault, snatched two suitcases from under the sodden hood, and ran up the road towards the lighted window. With a shrug of resignation the other turned to follow him, but paused, measured the distance he had gone, then quickly faced Wade who was standing in the road, wondering whether or not to follow on foot. 'Care-

ful, monsieur! He does not know of my friend. He is strict! Enough! You must not get wet also. I must apologize. You are too good—but that is English!’

‘Cut along, monsieur,’ Wade replied, smiling. ‘We’ll drive up to the door and wait there. You’ll have to arrange with the people in the cottage to take care of the car——’

‘Oh! They can keep it, the brute. Twice to-day—and such a predicament! I want never to——’

‘Come on, imbecile! We are late enough already.’ The voice from ahead interrupted his objurgations, and he ran off, assuring the Englishmen by breathless over-shoulder cries that no extra clothes were needed, since the suit-cases were dry.

After a couple of cigarettes each, smoked while commenting desultorily upon this sequel to the Boulogne adventure, first one and then the other of the Englishmen would peer through the rain, irritated by the delay, but too samaritan to say so. A quarter of an hour, twenty minutes, half an hour passed. ‘Good God!’ muttered Wilson at last. ‘Have they gone to bed by mistake?’

At that moment the cottage door opened, and a peasant emerged carrying a storm-lantern. The swinging light tossed the man’s shadow up and down the wall of rain, breaking it into fantastic shapes against more solid objects, a tree, a stable, the wall of the house. He looked inquisitively into the luxurious car.

'The big brother cannot find his stockings,' he said, without any sign of amusement. 'He sent me to apologize for the delay. Will you take a bowl of soup?' Both declined, and Wade offered the man an English cigarette. This allayed all suspicions, and he became talkative, and stood chatting in the rain, having placed his lantern on the running-board, much to Wilson's uneasiness. Another ten minutes went by, while the peasant told them that he would put the Renault in his stable until next morning, when he could pass it over to the people at the garage in the village a mile further down the road. Wilson grunted, and did not offer to tow it for that short distance.

The elder brother was the first to appear. He came carrying both suit-cases. From his heavy gait and breathing Wade concluded that his temper was again ruffled.

'That utter imbecile!' he began, 'was ever such a—but pardon, monsieur, we have delayed you so long. Yet he has no clothes except a dress-suit! Whoever heard of motoring in a dress-suit? What did he take it for? But that is like my family. I have been trying to dry his other clothes; but no use! We must leave them here and I will have them sent for.' Then, turning to the man: 'You understand, my friend? To send the dry clothes with the car to this address?' And he gave him a card, and a sum of money that made the man stare, then burst into voluble thanks, which the other ignored.

‘Go and tell Monsieur——’ he roared.

But at that moment his brother appeared, looking nervously to right and left, and hugging himself as though to hide his appearance from any curious eyes that the night might present. He wore a boiled shirt and dinner jacket.

Wilson leaned over the steering-wheel, his impatience dissolved in a riot of silent laughter. Wade was differently affected. To his surprise, he felt the blood hot in his face. He resented that this little figure should be the clown of circumstance. Any kind of emotion, other than a numbing ennui, had been so foreign to him during the last few years that he now stared almost fearfully at this person who could so stimulate him. To cover his embarrassment, he jumped out of the car, ran to the door of the cottage, and flung his mackintosh over the pathetic figure.

‘Come along, monsieur,’ he said gently. ‘We must make a spurt to get your brother home in time.’

‘Monsieur!’ said the other; and Wade caught a gleam of lantern-light reflected from the brown eyes. It showed them rich with appreciation.

## CHAPTER IV

## EARLY NEXT MORNING

WADE had but little sleep that night. As a result of the adventures on the road, he reached Paris too late to go to his employer's house. At Wilson's invitation he found a room in the small hotel adjoining the garage behind the Madeleine, where the car was lodged. He was desperately tired, and borne down by that sub-normal depression which often follows a long motor drive. But he fell asleep only intermittently, being awakened each time by cars homing to the garage. Stimulated by over-exhaustion, his mind rebelled against its usual discipline, and allowed memories and speculations to promenade, a procession of ghosts and fears and hopes whipped in by the too familiar resentments. He was tempted once to reach out, switch on the light, and grope in his pocket for a letter received from his wife's solicitor two days before leaving England. It contained further humiliating niceties, about the question of legal costs, alimony, and the custody of the two boys. 'Damn the money,' he thought, half sick with apprehension. 'They can't squeeze a stone more than dry.' But he knew that this resignation was false, and that he was up against a most startling reality—the possibilities of a woman's vindictiveness toward a man whom she has treated shabbily. He wondered where the

whole matter would end, and tried again to persuade his impractical imagination that now he was safe; out of the country and out of reach.

But it seemed that every man's hand—at least, in his native land—was against him. There was this question of the Inland Revenue, who had suddenly descended upon him with a claim for six years' arrears of income tax incurred during that period of brief prosperity which had brought nothing but disaster.

More muddle; and due to his vague and unmethodical way of dealing with life. A fool is his own worst enemy, especially in a world run on jungle-law. He muttered this truism as though it were a soporific to put his fears to sleep.

From this failure he fell to thinking of the children. Poor little beggars! What a miserable start in life; all this emotional bewilderment for them. How unfair that they should be used as pawns in a game of greed and self-righteous posing between two so-called responsible grown-ups. He felt doubly guilty; for himself and for their mother. What *did* she want? Good God, he had asked her that question a thousand times; he had asked her lawyers, his own lawyers; he had asked himself. But the answer was always the same; humbug, evasion, tricky playing for ascendancy. And in the end always himself as the fool.

Towards dawn he fell asleep, to be roused unrefreshed by the maddening clatter of early-moving

Paris: voices, brooms and dust-pans, tram-gongs, shrill hooters.

He got up and shaved, staring with unseeing eyes at the familiar stranger in the mirror. The portrait of a gentleman, of uncertain training, educated at Harrow and in the Flemish university of mud and blood; well equipped for lending a hand toward the rebuilding of a shattered Europe. No wonder he had made such a mess of things! No wonder his—but the retrospect was nauseating. He dressed with cynical care, and went out to present himself before his new employer.

As he walked westward he was glad that he had dressed so carefully, for on this bright September morning Paris was immaculate. He was out early, and met the crowds of people hurrying to shops and offices. Everybody appeared to be spruce and light-hearted. Faces gleamed happily in the gay-melancholy sunshine. The air smelled of chest-nuts, box-hedges, and burning leaves, and these natural perfumes mingled like old memories with the many personal and artificial odours peculiar to Paris. The quality was feminine, but otherwise indefinable. Woman! Woman! The streets of Paris! Wade strolled on, half-amused by the play upon his senses. He was not sure of the position of the Rue Copernic, in which his employer had rented a furnished house, no doubt at enormous expense.

Wade reflected that he had not been out of England for ten years; at first because he was

looking for a living, and afterwards because he had found it. He was gratified to find that his French was much less rusty than he had expected. During the past two years, however, he had been reduced to giving English lessons to French people in London; but he had managed to evade the tediousness of that occupation by luring his pupils to pleasant conversations in their own tongue.

The morning was so fine, and the hour so early, that he decided to have a look at the river before concluding his search. He paused, uncertain which street to take in order to reach the Rue de Rivoli and the gardens. At the same time he took out his wallet and a collection of letters to make sure of the address. There it was: *William Fletcher, Hôtel de Vaudrac, Rue Copernic, Avenue Victor Hugo*. For the first time the coincidence struck him. He took out the young Frenchman's card. Certainly it was the same name: *Charles de Vaudrac*. He would have mused more over this had not the contents of his pocket still further prodded his memory. There lay the letters from the lawyers and the Inland Revenue. The former suggested that he should increase by £300 a year the allowance which he had agreed to pay the wife who had divorced him. The latter demanded, within six months, the sum of £780. He stood, turning over these gentle propositions, and pondering them against the knowledge that after cutting all his frayed connections in England, he remained possessed of about £350, with the prospect of £500

a year and keep from his new job that was to commence in two hours' time. These contrasts were so violent that by sheer paralysis of mind he turned and walked in the opposite direction, not recovering consciousness until he had re-passed the Madeleine and was half-way down the Rue de la Paix. At last, master of his vibrating nerves, he found himself staring fixedly into the window of a very expensive jeweller. Before his eyes lay the most exquisite platinum and diamond necklace. There was no price on it; but beside it lay a pair of ear-rings made to match it. They were marked at sixty thousand francs.

He looked at the necklace again, fascinated. Then, by some little trick of down-and-outedness, he lifted up his foot and glanced over his shoulder to make sure that his heels were well set up. No betrayal there. He speculated as to the value of this marvellous thing. For the necklace was beautiful as well as costly. Its design was original and bold, the metal embracing the stones as simply as the scales of an ash-bud hold the black resinous gem.

Who would come with a margarine-king's ransom and buy this bijou; and for whom? What a solution of one's difficulties! He looked guiltily to right and left. A short, tubby gentleman was standing in front of the adjoining shop. His back was toward Wade, but the apprehensive Englishman saw that he was watching him quizzically in the large plate-glass mirror in the milliner's door-

way. Wade fancied that he detected a slight lift of the eyebrows. It might be a warning. He turned away, about to walk on, when he was arrested by a hand on his sleeve. Feeling slightly sick and hunted, he closed his eyes for a second. He opened them again to see the stout brother of Monsieur Charles de Vaudrac!

'Monsieur! How fortunate! I must apologize indeed. We parted last night; and it was so late, and we were so distressed and exhausted, that I did not give you my card. Permit me, monsieur! I am grateful to you, in spite of the fact that I could not keep my engagement. An important engagement. Very important!' He flourished a card.

Without betraying the effort, Wade dragged himself out of the depths of his under-dog mood. The reaction was so extreme that he had to repress a hysterical giggle. For a moment he could not see the impressive figure addressing him. But his vision cleared; he stretched out a steady hand, took the card, and read the name: *Hilaire de Vaudrac*.

'I am honoured, sir,' he said coldly, still afraid of showing his embarrassment. 'I wish I could have done more, and assured the success of your appointment. But I am only mortal.'

The other was delighted at this ironic ceremoniousness, and again laid a hand on Wade's arm.

'I am sure you would. Sure of it,' he murmured. 'I cannot repay you. But I may chance to be of service. Who knows? I am always to be found.'

I take coffee each evening at the Quatrième République, in the Rue Saint-Honoré. I have a table there for myself and my friends.'

'Thank you,' said Wade dryly; then added without knowing why: 'I hope to meet your brother there, too.'

De Vaudrac's large and protruding eyes became fixed. He stared long enough for Wade to notice a fraternal resemblance. But they were larger and even more volatile than those of the younger brother. They belied the blustering manner, the slight pomposity, the protruding stomach, and the bristling hair and moustache.

'My brother?' he queried incredulously.

'Yes; I felt extremely sorry for him last night. He was so obviously worried.'

'Of course, of course! He is a generous imbecile—but he *is* an imbecile.' Then, as though ashamed of this confession to a stranger: 'At least; he is an innocent. Everybody is kind to him. Even my father!'

'Ah, you have other near relatives? You are fortunate. It is more comfortable than being quite alone in the world.'

Again Wade could not understand the part he was playing. He talked mechanically, idly attempting here and there to kindle some warmth in the dead actualities around him. Alone in the world! What a phrase; as though it meant anything. Who was *not* alone in the world; no matter what possessions, what relatives one might pride oneself

on? He had possessed both, and lost both, and now knew the sham. But the Frenchman was speaking: he must make a pretence of interest, or at least attention.

'There are not many of us now, monsieur—monsieur——'

'Wade. Gregory Wade.'

De Vaudrac tried the name once, twice; and the third time had adapted it to his French tongue. He continued: 'We belong to the past. My father, the Comte, lives on that fact. He is still a royalist. But I have an elder brother; and between my imbecile Charles and myself is a sister. All that is left of an illustrious and idle line.' He shrugged his shoulders, and grinned, with a hint of apology for this parade of family history.

'Many old things are dying now,' said Wade. He was frankly bored, and wanted to get away. But his banal remark was seized upon. De Vaudrac expanded.

'What of it?' he asked, almost threatening the languid figure of the Englishman. 'That foolish dreaming over the past, that absurd fastidiousness where there is no reason for it! Were our ancestors so gentle, so scrupulous? How did they win their wealth, their château, their town house? By collecting stamps and furniture? By writing memoirs and monographs?' He spoke with a grievance; but Wade now suspected that the grievance was only skin-deep. A certain pride lay beneath it. Why should this Frenchman air these

idiosyncrasies of his family if he was really ashamed of them?

'No!' he said. 'Our family was not built thus. Soldiers built it; men of affairs, who faced and fought the world!'

'Caught it by the throat?' suggested Wade.

'Caught it . . .? Yes! Yes! And hung on!'

'Like heroes! No false sentiment!' Wade wondered if he had gone too far with mockery. Why work off his own chagrin on this simple-minded stranger? But the Frenchman was not so simple-minded. He felt the detachment, the criticism, and stopped himself as he was about to launch into oratory. With hand suspended, he looked at Wade, frowned, then suddenly chuckled, good nature triumphant.

'I must go,' he said; 'I have to repair last night's omission. Remember, monsieur, I am to be found . . . any evening!' And raising his hat he lumbered back into the shop. With all his bulk and his clumsy movements he was noiseless.

Wade stood irresolute for a moment, saw the tubby little man still staring at him from the mirror in the next shop; hesitated again, then turned and walked in the other direction, down the street toward the Colonne Vendôme. Entering the Tuileries he was again enveloped in the sensuous delights of the autumn morning; the umber tinges in the chestnut trees, the flashing of pigeons' wings, the fading gorgeousness of the French parterres. He saw the origin of the pagan incense that

pervaded the streets. The gardeners were piling trucks of leaves on to a bonfire under the wall, and children ran laughing and shouting at the ballooning smoke as it caught in the branches and was dissipated into the air, adding perfume without smirching the glory and sparkle of the morning light.

Wade walked on, amused by his reflections over this third encounter, wondering what might be the significance of it. He felt already as though he were in some way associated with this de Vaudrac family. It seemed to possess a collective personality, a cumulative force hanging over from centuries of past activity. 'The remains of its capital,' he said, translating his moods and impressions into terms of his permanent misery. 'Well, I hope it lasts longer than mine!'

This train of thought was interrupted as he passed two small boys about the age of his own children. He looked at them with haunted eyes, such pain in his expression that the children's mother was frightened and called to them.

Wade started, turned his head away, and hurried on. He was already late.

## CHAPTER V

## AN OLD AMERICAN FAMILY

SUDDENLY shut away from his surroundings, Wade made his way westward across the Place de la Concorde, up the avenue, and through the Arc de Triomphe, down the Avenue Kléber, and without further delay reached the short road where the American was living. He walked the length of the street, looking at the mansions on both sides. Few of them were named, and none had the name *de Vaudrac* on its gates. There being nobody in the street, he decided to inquire at the larger corner house. It was freshly decorated, and appeared to be the most prosperous. But he was wrong. A man in a green apron told him that the Hôtel de Vaudrac was half-way down the street, on the opposite side. The fellow came to the gate and stood there pointing, while Wade crossed the road, rather petulant with himself for his lack of intuition.

The house was one of the smallest in the road. It was half hidden behind tall railings and a number of maple trees; but Wade could see much ornate dilapidation. The roof was *en mansarde*, covered with fish-scale tiles in several colours. The place must have been built toward the end of the seventeenth century.

With misgiving and indifference Wade opened

the rusted gates and walked up the short drive. He found that the porch had been cleaned and the front door painted. A man was weeding the drive. Before the door stood the new Daimler and Wilson beside it, smiling.

‘Lost you this morning, sir,’ he said.

Wade opened and shut his mouth convulsively, and when he replied his voice was hoarse and almost inaudible. Wilson showed concern.

‘The boss is waiting to go out, sir,’ he said. ‘But he wanted to see you first.’

‘Why, am I late?’

‘I was ordered to take him out at ten-fifteen.’

‘Good Lord, I was to be here at ten!’

Hurrying up the steps, he rang the bell. The door opened instantly, and another man, in a green baize apron, stood before him, peering nervously into his face.

‘Monsieur is waiting,’ he said, with a little gasp of anxiety.

Wade entered a lofty hall lit by a domed skylight in the roof. On both sides at the back, staircases curved up to meet on a balcony that led off to right and left. In the centre of the balcony stood ornamented double doors, overburdened with an architrave of marble, carved with baroque extravagance. The doors also were carved and gilded round long mirror panels.

The centre floor of the hall was covered with a large fawn-coloured hair-carpet, on which stood a few pieces of modern steel furniture: chairs, a table

with a black glass top, a dumb-waiter filled with bottles of liqueur and spirits. Beyond the carpet escaped the edges of a great battle-piece laid in mosaic. Against the gilded and mirror-panelled walls stood some Louis Quatorze chairs, a couch, and a large buhl cabinet. The incongruity of the sides with the centre of the hall was so violent that even Wade noticed it.

Glancing up, he saw a tall, dark woman leaning over the baluster of the balcony, peering at him through a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles. As soon as she had satisfied herself, she snatched off the spectacles with a gesture either of anger or impatience, turned away, and disappeared along the corridor leading off from the balcony.

But Wade had no time to speculate who this might be. The man was hurrying him along, and he had to follow across the hall, into the half-darkness beneath the balcony. Here he waited while his guide knocked at a door directly below the state portal.

The room was evidently the library, for the lower part of the silk-lined walls was hidden by books; the rows of bindings that looked more like dusty furniture than books. Bundles of newspapers and periodicals were wedged between the shelves and the tops of the volumes, and nearer the window the shelves were occupied by box files laid flat, the displaced books being piled on the floor. At the window nearest that corner of the room stood a khaki-coloured metal office-table, and a filing

cabinet. Drawn up to the table stood a tapestry-covered high-back chair, eighteenth century. The metal chair to match the table was pushed back near the cabinet.

Wade had no opportunity to observe more of the room. About to turn round to examine an old bracket-clock, he was almost startled to see a section of the book-laden shelves swing outward. A tall, thin man emerged, nervously stooping and ducking his head twice to avoid knocking it. He was rubbing his fingers over the backs of his hands, working off pieces of towel-fluff. Seeing Wade, he stood still, muttering and frowning irritably, while he put a hand behind him and pushed the false door. It shut with a sucking noise of leather meeting leather.

The Englishman, though weary and empty-hearted and expecting nothing further to draw his interest, was nevertheless impressed by this shambling, white-haired figure.

'I guess we do things more punctually in America, Mr. Wade.'

The new secretary's depression and misgiving were increased by the deep, melancholy tones. He felt like an undergraduate on the carpet. The more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger voice, schooled into an exaggerated Oxford accent, spoke again as the old man picked his way over the floor and seated himself in the high-backed chair. 'Pray take a seat,' he said, indicating the steel chair. He then examined his trembling fingers as Wade obeyed

him. 'Forgive me for not shaking hands.' He searched in the pen-tray, took up an orange-stick, and began to manicure nails already immaculate. 'There is always risk; unnecessary risk, especially in this insanitary country. I don't know how one escapes. But so far, fortunately——' He stopped, frowned, and changed his tone. 'I think you were to begin your duties at ten o'clock, Mr. Wade? I'm sorry you are three-quarters of an hour late; I guess that isn't a good beginning.'

'I'm sorry, sir,' said Wade, too humbled to offer any excuses.

'We're both sorry. However, perhaps it is just as well. It enables us to begin with an understanding. Time and cleanliness, Mr. Wade; these are particular little points with me. I've grown old in the habits of punctuality and hygiene; and I can't change my habits now. People who can't conform—you see——' And with a gesture he indicated banishment.

'I hope, sir——' began Wade, only to be interrupted.

'Don't hope, please. The machine doesn't hope. And the machine is the only perfectly functioning object. It can be repaired and replaced exactly. It has no feelings, no psychology factor. I try to model myself on the machine, I expect you to do the same, so long as we are together.'

'Most of my generation have had a good training in that technique,' said Wade. His pale face was flushed, and his eyes, usually heavy-lidded, were

wide open and glinting. 'For four years we were even less than machines. And I suppose most people now are the same; merely servants of the machine.'

Mr. Fletcher looked up from his manicure, squinted down his thin, crooked nose, then smiled wryly.

'You are not a socialist, by any chance?'

He leaned forward, waiting for the answer. But Wade could not reply, for Mr. Fletcher suddenly leaned still lower, shut one eye, and sighted along the table.

'Dust!' he murmured, his voice horror-stricken. He poked out a disgusted finger and touched the offensive spot. Almost with alacrity, he jumped up, rang the bell, and hurried toward the concealed door, holding out his hand as though it were streaming with blood. 'These French servants. One is in constant danger! Excuse me, I must wash my hands.'

Wade sat still, at a loss what to do next. The door had swung back, and he could see his employer in the little closet, leaning over the lavatory basin, turning the taps, and scrubbing his nails. 'Ring that bell again, Mr. Wade! Confound them, they aren't even in attendance!'

Wade rang, and remained standing, hovering uneasily. He was both amused and uncomfortable. What was it to be like, working for an eccentric? Perhaps a good thing. It might make life so exacting that he would have no time for

himself, no time to brood over——; but the second ring of the bell had been fruitful.

No servant appeared, however. Wade saw the handsome woman whom he had noticed on the balcony. She was now still more annoyed, and swung her spectacles in her hand as though they were a sling. She discharged her words, too, like pebbles; hard, concise missiles of anger. The effect was majestic. Wade admired the deep bosom, the perfect coiffure, the shapely hands and feet. She was tall, and Wade felt that the old man was a shrivelled caricature of her. She created the same effect of uncertainty. What would she do; what would she say? The atmosphere was uncomfortable; stimulating, perhaps, but with a sense of treachery.

‘What do you want, father?’ she cried. She spoke with a slight, Southern States accent, her voice rich and deep, the words slurred. A fine insolence, thought Wade, turning away with a little shrinking of fear. ‘You know the women are all occupied at this time of day, and Jacques is——’ but she stopped, too sensuously conscious of her own irritation to pursue her protests. ‘So you are the new secretary?’ she said, approaching Wade and looking at him in such a way that he shrank within his clothes. First his hair, then his ears, and so piecemeal down to his feet, those eyes examined him. Unable to speak, he stood at attention, and bowed slightly. The woman may have taken this as a snub, for her languid interest

suddenly sharpened, and for the first time she stared straight into Wade's eyes. 'They are usually younger,' she added.

'Are they so many?' he asked, and at this effrontery she again concentrated her gaze, studying him now with satisfaction added to her curiosity.

'I reckon it's an undying procession,' she said.

'I hope I shall bring up the rear.'

He replied recklessly, stimulated by a sense of danger, reminding him of the distant days of war. Here, too, he recognized a force of malice harmonizing with his own desperation of spirit. This woman was a potential ally for anybody who had lost faith in life, who hated his fellow-creatures, who despised the false attractions of chance. What magnificent limbs, what powerful shoulders! That body, that scornful yet hungry face were the embodiment of the genius of destruction.

But these fantasies were interrupted by the emergence of Mr. Fletcher from the cabinet and the entrance of another woman. This new-comer was less handsome than the other, but she was exquisitely dressed. Her figure was good, and her well-chosen clothes almost disguised her thinness. It showed, however, in her hands and ankles, and in the hollows of her neck. Wade was conscious of a large mouth, and wide-set eyes, and dark hair more easily dressed than that of her sister (obviously her elder sister). When she spoke he again noticed a resemblance. The same richness

and full plum-bloom quality, southern and opiate, were there; but the whole physical significance of voice was re-directed by the difference of character and tone.

'Daddy!' she cried, approaching her father and taking him lovingly by the arm, 'I thought you would be gone, and I wanted to see you so importantly—about young Farthing.'

'Young? Young?' muttered the old man, momentarily softened as he patted the hand that lay on his sleeve. 'He's as old as you are, girl—older. I'm getting——'

'Yes, but she'll never wean him,' interrupted the sister. 'You've got an obstinate lamb there, Miriam. He'll drain you dry before he lets go. You're losing flesh daily, I guess!'

The girl turned, smiling, to answer her sister, and for the first time saw Wade, who at her approach to her father had stepped back as though to remove himself from the family intimacy.

'Oh!' she exclaimed. 'I beg your pardon,' and she looked to the others.

'These are my daughters, Mr. Wade,' said the old man, who had forgotten his annoyance. 'Josephine, Miriam.'

Wade found himself shaking hands with the younger daughter, and exchanging friendly smiles. The other looked on without approaching, nodded, and turned to her father.

'I feel like some fresh air, this morning, father. I guess I'll come along and try your English car.'

You can drop me off at the Rue Cambon. I've got an errand there.'

'Well, look here, Mr. Wade, will you glance over the mail? I've opened most of the letters, but there is a bundle of newspapers to mark. I want you to notice the prices and jot down—but there, you'll not be able to recognize what interests me. We must do it together a time or two. And I want you to read to me each day. It helps—but we've lost that this morning. Pity you were late. Pity you were late.' He took Josephine's arm and stumbled out of the room, not hearing Miriam's exclamations of dismay.

Left alone with Wade, the girl turned to him.

'He's an aggravating old darling,' she said. 'It is impossible to make him give attention. He seems never to hear; but days, weeks later, he will ask you what you were saying about so-and-so.'

'He's not a young man, Miss Fletcher.'

'No; and he has lived at a tremendous pace. For forty years he has driven at full speed, and now he can't stop. All this hurry and racket and affairs. It's a dummy show, really, Mr. Wade, while the money still rolls in from his past activities. I don't know what you'll find to do really.'

'I hope to make myself useful,' said Wade, again dispirited. He did not like the prospect of being an old man's nurse. But five hundred a year and keep! A few years at that rate would give him time to think things over, if they were worth thinking over. And he doubted whether the old fellow

was quite as senile as this girl imagined. Not very amiable of her to give him away so easily to a stranger and a servant. Yes, a servant! Unique position for one who had been his own master since leaving the army!

No doubt, he said to himself as he looked again at this girl's expensive clothes, these two women are hanging like leeches, bleeding the old father to death, and sneering at him behind his back. With this conclusion, Wade seated himself at the table and took up a handful of letters.

'You 'll excuse me if I make a start,' he said.

'Certainly.' She was looking at him with a gleam of amusement in those wide-set eyes. 'You 'll find a letter there from a certain Lincoln Farthing. He is an unfortunate young friend of mine: one of those Orestean souls who are dogged by bad fortune and never blame themselves for it! He is the son of the famous Julius Farthing. I expect you know the name?'

'Oh, of course,' lied Wade.

'Father has a fine collection of his etchings at home. They are worth ten times what he gave for them in the early days, before Farthing made his reputation.'

'You mean the etcher?' said Wade, his memory suddenly waking. Julius Farthing, the greatest engraver since Dürer; fancy forgetting that name. Another sign of decay; everything pointed to it. Memory, enthusiasm, even the most elementary intelligence gone. Nothing left but a shell, half-

animated by the merest mechanism of life. He looked at the thin hand clutching the letters. A cluster of bones and half-transparent flesh. How should he animate it; pull what wires to give it a simulacrum of life?

He had to turn aside to hide from this interested stranger the fear that gripped him.

## CHAPTER VI

### MILD FLASHES OF TEMPER

SOME moments passed while Miriam Fletcher talked. She was telling Wade about Lincoln Farthing, her unfortunate friend who always stumbled into difficulties no matter how often and how firmly he was put upon the right road. She was about to explain that the fault lay in his constitution, and that she considered herself responsible, in a maternal sort of way, for finding him new vocations. He possessed unlimited talents; indeed, it was his astonishing versatility that—but at this point she realized that she was talking without an audience. Wade sat at the table, the letters still in his hand; but he was deaf, his mind was blank. She stared at him, and in the silence following the lame suspension of her monologue, she became aware of something unusual in this man.

That lampless face frightened her; she had never before encountered such complete negation.

Then suddenly he returned to the world. His tightly-set lips relaxed, the muscles of his face twitched, and the staring blankness vanished from his eyes. He shut them, as though recovering from some breath-robbing physical effort, passed his left hand over his mouth, smiled wanly, and turned to her.

‘Poor devil!’ he said. ‘Why not?’

The remark appeared to have a faint relevance, and though the young woman was sceptical, she accepted it as a bridge to carry over the conversation. But while she talked about the unfortunate son of a famous man, her attention was fixed upon this more immediate occasion for pity. Here was somebody—and a very attractive being—obviously suffering from a spiritual wound; and he being an older man, his trouble was likely to be more malignant.

Wade was conscious of her sympathetic curiosity, and he resented it. He stood up, looked at her coldly, and deliberately tried to snub her. ‘Perhaps you are too kind to him,’ he said, sneering. ‘Women *can* be like that. They can stifle a man with comfort, and then, when their interest is over, they can push him out, defenceless!’

‘You exaggerate,’ was the quiet reply. ‘I don’t think I’ve stifled Lincoln Farthing. Nobody has spoken plainer to him than I have. But he is rather an irresistible creature. His appearance so

belies him! But I see I'm boring you, and I don't wonder! Why you should have to listen to all this talk about a stranger, I don't know.'

'I wasn't listening. I've heard the story too often!'

'You are a real Englishman. You think you are being rude; and really you are only being pathetic.'

She smiled at him, and turned to walk out, but encountering the concierge who had entered the room, she took from him a small package. He explained that it was to be opened and its contents examined before the messenger left.

'Will you look at it, Mr. Wade?' she asked, returning to the table. Wade, relieved by the lapse from personalities, took the packet, cut the string with his pocket-knife, broke the wax seal, and revealed a jeweller's leather-covered box.

'Good Lord!' he said, staring intently at the jewels.

'What surprises you?' He was a most original person, the dark American decided, with his quick alternations of mood. What *was* the matter with him? He seemed to be playing a part, even though involuntarily.

'I've already examined these once this morning,' he said. And he told her how he had stopped before the shop window, attracted by the necklace and by these ear-rings (or others exactly like them), and had been frightened away by a man whom he knew to be a detective.

‘Do I look like a criminal?’ he asked, and for the first time he smiled.

‘You do, rather,’ she replied seriously.

‘Why, how is that?’

‘You have a hunted look.’

This was an inquisitive challenge, and again he withdrew.

‘That’s common to everybody,’ he said. ‘At least, when they reach my age. No man—I don’t know about women—can live in this world for forty years without it.’

She was more interested in the ear-rings, however, and ignored the remark. Taking the case from the table where he had placed it, she opened a little slip of paper tucked into the hinge. Wade saw a pulse flutter in the hollows of the thin neck. She stood motionless for a moment, then closed the box and replaced it on the table.

‘It’s for my sister Josephine,’ she said quietly; and with a slight flush in her cheeks, she walked out of the room.

Without any guilty sense of eavesdropping, Wade opened the box again, told the concierge to satisfy the messenger, and unfolded the slip. It was not addressed to anybody. It simply stated: ‘I could not possibly get back in time last night, so I slept at my flat. Forgive me, and accept this peace-offering. Hilaire.’

Wade stood with the box in his hand and the note in the other, pondering them. In this attitude he was discovered by Hilaire de Vaudrac, who had

followed up his own gift, hoping to profit by the good impression which it must make upon the lady. Creeping gingerly into the room, more like a crestfallen husband than a lover, he stopped abruptly, and stared with goggling eyes.

'You?' he said, still incredulous.

Wade enjoyed the situation. He appreciated anything touched with derision. Here was an expressive incident, slightly ridiculous and futile. It justified his conception of life.

'Yes,' he replied, smiling as he put down the box and prepared to refold the note.

'What are you doing with that?' demanded the Frenchman, annoyed by this air of detachment. 'Why are you here, anyway?'

'I am Mr. Fletcher's new secretary. That is why I have opened the packet. It had to be examined before the messenger would go. You have very good taste, monsieur.'

The other looked at him sharply, still bristling. But curiosity triumphed; and also the compliment pleased him.

'Well, I'm damned!' he said, and took the box from Wade, who had closed it after inserting the note. Wade spoke.

'It ought to have just the opposite effect.'

At this, M. de Vaudrac looked hastily over his shoulder, hesitated, then stepped confidentially toward Wade.

'You never know,' he whispered. 'These American women; they are tremendous. They are *avid*!'

He lingered on the word with relish. 'But that is what makes them so superb; they demand so much. I feel like—like Mark Antony!'

He almost hugged himself at the retrospect of tortures endured, and at the prospect of others to come.

'Will it be worth losing your kingdom for, monsieur?' asked Wade.

The other laughed aloud, and patted him on the shoulder confidentially. 'My friend,' he said, 'we understand these matters? Isn't that so?'

'Ah, I see it is not too serious!'

'Oh, but believe me, it is desperate. You must see the lady. She is——'

'I have already seen her.'

'Ah! And what do you think of her?'

'I prefer her sister.'

At these words M. de Vaudrac sobered. He at once grew cautious and reserved.

'So you have also met Miss Miriam?'

'I've had that pleasure.'

The Frenchman mused over this, pulling his moustache and frowning.

'Recently?' he asked, looking slyly at Wade.

'A minute ago.'

'Then she—then she saw *this*?' and he held out the case.

Wade, at a loss how to reply in order to sustain the comedy, was saved by Miss Miriam, who entered the room dressed in outdoor clothes. They made her look more the American, smart and rather

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unapproachable. But she still carried that personal quality of grace, an almost tender gentleness that rebelled against the austerity and dignity of her clothes.

De Vaudrac turned quickly, slipping the jewel-case into his trouser-pocket. Wade noticed that his face—normally full and hearty—had paled, and this change brought out an unexpected resemblance to the younger brother; something that appealed for sympathy and protection. In this burly man of the world, the aspect was almost ludicrous. Wade was not the only one to see it, however, for he observed in Miss Fletcher's eyes a conflict of feeling. Her voice, too, betrayed it.

'Hilaire, you look bothered,' she said. 'Has one of your markets crashed? Tell me; then I can break the news to Antoinette, for I am just going to meet her.'

She half smiled at him, but there was a gleam of sad reproach in it.

'Tell my sister,' he replied—then stopped, at a loss for words. After a moment's perplexity he continued—much to the relief of Wade, who was now embarrassed by an element of seriousness and underlying pain that had entered the conversation—'Tell Antoinette that I am still the victim of her friend's mockery.'

'It does you no harm, Hilaire,' she said, without smiling. Then touching his hand, she added: 'I'm anxious about Lincoln Farthing. He's out of a job again. I know you got him that last one,

but he couldn't get along well with the head of his department.'

'Why not?' De Vaudrac had now recovered. He was brusque, overbearing, with bristling eyebrows and moustache and hedgehog hair. 'Eh, *why* not?'

'Well,' she replied apologetically, 'he wrote to me about it. I had the letter this morning and he said he was coming round. But he hasn't come.'

'No; he wouldn't be out of bed yet.'

'Don't be mean, Hilaire.'

'Aah! Mean? I expect that is the reason why he's lost this job. Too tired, too bored to get up each morning to go to it! Miriam, you make——'

'No,' she laid a restraining hand on his arm. 'He gave another reason! He says this chief is an old fool who doesn't know his business!'

Wade looked up from his work as her laughter rippled over the impending storm. De Vaudrac's face was purple, his eyes bloodshot, and he spoke with difficulty.

'That is your American way of bringing up youngsters. See what comes of your softness, your bath taps, your sticky sweets, your—your immoral baseball education with no hard work, no tradition, no discipline——'

'But, Hilaire, you forget his mother is a German! and *they* have discipline enough. And he has been educated in France!'

'Educated in France!' He breathed fire at her. 'If *you* call that education! Playing truant, sham-

ming illness, his father always running after him, waiting on him like a servant, and hushing up his crimes——'

'No, not *crimes*, Hilaire!'

'Well, his indiscretions. Why, he never did a full day's work during the whole of his school years. How he has managed to survive I don't know. No respect for anything or anybody, no method, no sense of order or persistence. Only because there has always been some doting woman to spoil him, to coax him again and again to fresh efforts that never last more than a few weeks! He's just a self-indulgent, conceited fool, without any idea of discipline, or any pride, ambition——'

'Stop! Hilaire, you make me angry! Mr. Wade, this is untrue. He has no understanding. He is as hard as——'

'Hard! Am I? Hard! Look you, hard!' De Vaudrac almost screamed the word, flinging up his arms until his coat rumbled up over his collar. His face was apoplectic, and he poked it forward dangerously, glaring into Miriam's eyes like a dragon about to devour her. 'You're a fool, an imbecile, that's what you are, my lady. You with your beauty and your mad generosity that knows no discrimination, you turn the whole of your generation into a nursery of milksops. France is covered with your babies—your great overgrown babies, too soft to lift a hand to help themselves or to do anything useful for the community. Yes, you are dangerous—dangerous——'

But he stopped in mid-flight as Miriam reached out and dealt him a ringing smack across the cheek with her gloved hand. Wade jumped up, blushing with embarrassment.

'Damn you, you noisy brute!' she said. Her voice was hardly raised above its normal sweetness. 'My mad generosity is no madder than yours, you large-hearted beast.' She seized him by the lapels of his coat and snatched the handkerchief which he was holding to his face. Staring at the weal for a moment, she suddenly pulled off her gloves and put her hand to it. Then flinging her arms round his neck she kissed the sore spot, and pushed him from her so violently that he staggered. His eyes were dark with silent rage, and he could find nothing to say.

'Look what you've done!' she cried, after this pantomime, and holding out a split glove. 'Look at it! You'd better take it!' And she seized his pocket, rammed the gloves into it, stamped her foot, and ran out of the room.

Calm after the storm; Wade at a loss what to do, or to say. He looked at the letters, waiting, telling himself that surely this was the most contradictory female he had ever seen. Never did appearance and conduct consort so oddly. But you could never tell, never trust——

'Thank God,' breathed de Vaudrac, quietly straightening his jacket and smoothing down his trouser-legs. 'She has not seen it!' Then, before Wade could correct this mistake, de Vaudrac turned

to him and whispered reverently: 'A wonderful girl. I would die rather than abuse her confidence. She is capable of great things. She could—could——' but to complete the morning's madness, he burst into tears.

Wade leaned back in his chair, like a school-master contemplating a blubbing scholar. De Vaudrac was dabbing his eyes and wiping his moustache with the gloves. The spectacle was so absurd that the onlooker had to subdue his laughter by grasping his mouth firmly and pulling the loose flesh forward.

Upon this tableau the door again opened, and a young Adonis entered. His fine, tall figure was disguised by his slouching gait, and by a loose black suède jerkin and baggy grey plus-fours. Wade looked up at ruffled red hair and a straight nose. The handsome face was marred by the petulant restlessness of the blue eyes, and by the pendulous lower lip.

The young man made straight for the table, throwing an arm affectionately over de Vaudrac's shoulder as he passed. The blue eyes rested, without any gleam of curiosity, on Wade, as their owner spoke:

'Give me a cigarette, old thing. I don't know you, but I know you 've got a cigarette. Thanks. Oh, thanks. Hilaire, a match. I 've lost mine. I lose everything. I 've lost my job; I see you 're crying about it. Don't, old fellow, *don't*! I 'm not worth it. I 'm the most utter fool that ever

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breathed! But really, you know——' He blew two streams of smoke through his handsome nostrils, and seated himself on the edge of the table, thereby causing the neatly piled letters and papers to slide into new confusion. Wade put out a warning hand, murmuring, 'Steady, steady!' The young god looked down at the havoc, moved further along, and knocked another pile to the floor.

'Oh, blast!' he said, with disgust, 'that's like me. I always put my foot in it. But *really*, Hilaire, if you had worked with that old bore for half an hour you'd have gone mad. I know *you* would. You *couldn't* have stood it. I mean he's such a vulgar blighter. He can't even speak decently. The worse kind of petit bourgeois. Always fussing about, too. He never trusted anybody for a minute. I mean it wasn't *decent*. He'd got no vision. I made every effort to——'

De Vaudrac, who had been collecting himself, and running his fingers round inside his collar, was now able to resume his dignity.

'I'm sure; I'm sure! Quite, quite!' he said, clucking and blinking his eyes, as though the whole matter were trivial and not worth a moment's consideration. 'We'll see about something else. But you are very naughty, Farthing, very naughty. What will your parents say, young man? Tell me that!'

'Oh, for God's sake! Why drag them into it? What a spectre at the feast you are, Hilaire. You make my blood run cold. Surely we shall find

someone who will appreciate me? Damn it, man, I've got my points after all, and there are a thousand things I can try in Paris. If the worst happens, I could get a walking-on part in a film studio; anything to keep going, so that the mater and the guv'nor need not be bothered. I mean they've had about enough of me already, and I tell you I feel very sore about it, especially as the old man is so down and out these days.'

He jumped off the table, slouched nervously up and down, treading in the parquetry patterns outside the border of the carpet.

'What am I to do, Hilaire? I feel I must go and shoot myself. I'm such a miserable swine; and the old people, and Miriam, and everybody else are so damned decent.' His voice trembled. But de Vaudrac waved a hand to silence him and also to announce his own exit.

'I must run. We'll do something, though, Farthing. Ah, you young imbecile! I *know* your kind! But I must go. Excuse me, Mr. Wade, au revoir, au revoir.' And he was gone.

Wade resumed his work. The young man stood watching the door, apparently deciding whether or not he should follow de Vaudrac. His eyes were furtive and angry, and his underlip hung open like the mouth of a sack. Three or four times he sighed and twitched himself into a different posture, turning with the last and facing Wade. His glare was malevolent.

'You look infernally busy.'

'I am.'

'Who *are* you, anyway?'

'Who *are you*?'

Silence. A measuring of swords. Wade, suddenly resentful and seeking a too-easy victim, spoke first.

'Your name's Farthing, I understand. Have you an appointment with any one here? If so, I am at your service——'

The other succumbed.

'I say, I'm awfully sorry.' Then he rallied, and spoke venomously. 'If you must be so shirty and sarcastic.'

'Not at all,' said Wade. 'Only too glad to assist you. That's what I'm here for.'

'Well, assist me to another cigarette, and tell me who you are.'

Farthing's petulant young face was completely changed as he spoke. Some humour in the situation had surprised him into a new mood, and Wade was introduced to another phase of this mercurial creature: a pleasant, even a charming mood, to which he was forced to respond. He could understand now, as he surrendered to that ingenuous, smiling face, why people appeared to be so tolerant toward the young fool. He threw a packet of yellows on to the table, with a benevolent 'Help yourself! I am Wade, Mr. Fletcher's new secretary.'

## CHAPTER VII

## A LITTLE HISTORY; A LITTLE RESOLUTION

THE Fletchers were an old Virginian family whose wealth had once been in land and human flesh and blood. The economic processes of the nineteenth century had transferred it to a variety of other so-called substantial forms, few of them having anything more solid than a paper existence. William Fletcher, however, showed great skill in manipulating wealth while it remained so fluid. Perhaps this may have been due to the fact that such activity need not soil his fingers. It was germ-proof. So far as germs were concerned he had a persecution mania; and this mania assorted oddly with his European associations. His family had long been connected with France. His great-grandfather, who had known Lafayette and had been present at a meeting between Talleyrand and William Cobbett in a Philadelphia bookshop run by a Frenchman named Moreau de St. Méry, married a young French heiress whom he also met in that shop. She brought not only English securities (for her family had been wise before the event of the Revolution of 1789), but also a rich gallic ichor to liven up the Fletcher blood. Her eldest son was a gay blade who inherited from her both the art of living and a faculty for safe investments. He showed the latter so strongly, indeed, that the Fletcher fortunes

wove themselves tenaciously into the developing industries of the Northern States. The home estate in Virginia, source of the family wealth, became a minor asset, little more than a hobby. The Fletchers hardly noticed when its prosperity was destroyed by the Civil War. They freed their slaves, but continued to support them on the waves of gold that came flowing southward from interests in steel, in railroads, in banking, and a hundred other pioneer developments in the growing industrial centres.

That French marriage, therefore, was a genealogical event to be proud of. The closest associations were maintained with France. All children of the Fletcher family finished their education in that country, the heart of civilization. Since the War, William Fletcher had spent the major part of ten years there, for his over-sensitive nerves, his hypochondriac habits, and the bereavement following his wife's death had made him recoil in disgust from the excessive prosperity of his own country during the boom period.

From his château in Montpellier, he had warded his fortunes with anxiety, prophesying disaster as they swelled; raking in the automatic revenues with an exquisite distaste. An observer, watching this valetudinarian at the task, could have wondered whether his French great-grandmother might not have had more than a passing acquaintance with Talleyrand in the bookshop of Monsieur de St. Méry.

Certainly, Fletcher succeeded in conveying part

of his fears to his daughters. Both of them received a handsome allowance. Josephine, the elder, alternately hoarded and squandered. Generally she ministered to her voluptuous appetites, and spent money freely on clothes, jewels, furniture, and bijoux of which she soon tired. Caught in the ebb-tides of her desires, she would dispose of these accumulations, either selling them (sometimes even at a profit), or giving them away strategically, as one would cast bread upon the waters. She thus had a number of friends, all content to humour her in her moods of parsimony and thrift. At such periods she became as rigid as a nun. She dressed with a severe simplicity, dragged back her dark hair, and economized in cosmetics. The effect was to make her more voluptuously appealing than ever. Her rich mouth, her broad shoulders and deep, magnificent breasts, gloried under the restraint, offering such spendthrift promises that her friends crowded round her, lavish in gifts both material and emotional. Her privations were, therefore, not very considerable. Even in her extravagant moods she was safe, for, in addition to the allowance from her father, she received a very healthy alimony from the husband whom she had divorced on grounds of cruelty, since he had forced her to live in San Francisco where he made his money in marine insurance.

Miriam's reaction to her father's fears was characteristic of her temperament. It drove her to no extremes. By taste, by heredity, and by

environment she needed the best of everything. Her expenditure, therefore, was large. But she spent without self-indulgence, and she kept so well within her allowance that her reserve was becoming a very safe, independent fortune.

She told nobody of this, except Hilaire de Vaudrac, the brother of her friend Antoinette. He acted as her broker, and she never had cause to regret taking his advice. Indeed, they were friends, very good friends. She knew how deeply he respected her, and that his respect was tinged with fear. Her astonishing competence in money matters won his admiration, but it also made him a little awe-stricken, so that he treated her as though she were older than her thirty years, older even than her sister of thirty-five, whose hungry beauty appealed to certain other instincts in his nature. Of these he was not so proud, and he persuaded himself that Miriam was ignorant of them.

Whether she was ignorant or merely tolerant, she now hurried through the streets very angry with him, and also with herself for having exhibited her feelings. She had never before had definite proof that Josephine was intimate with Hilaire. This may have been due to a reluctance to accept evidence. She had never even admitted to herself that her feelings toward him were more than friendly. But this present rude intrusion of fact forced her to be more honest. She loved him. That was a disturbing fact. As she walked toward the rendezvous where Antoinette awaited her, she asked

herself what would be the consequence of this discovery. Above all things, she valued her independence. She had won it, building up for herself an active life, competing with men, mistress of her own mind and emotions and fortune.

She thought of young Farthing. He was a symbol of her attainment. It was ridiculous to think that he was a year older than herself. She lavished upon him no less than a maternal care. What would happen to that relationship now? For there had been moments, when he was particularly attractive—and would it be possible to withdraw now, to hoard herself against a change of emotional necessity? She had no idea of any kind of subterfuge in these matters. Like her sister, she gave where she wanted; but unlike Josephine, she asked for no return. The effect of that difference was far-reaching. It was the source of her ability for restraint and discipline. It prevented her from these hungry eagernesses which override the judgment and make us grasp so much that we lose all. Her lack of self-interest was, therefore, her best business asset. It had made her successful in money matters, and it had preserved her from any seriously disturbing love affair.

Flushed and breathless after her unusual display of temper, she decided not to walk all the way to Antoinette's flat. Sitting in the 'Métro' between Kléber and Ternes stations, she tried to dismiss the incident from her mind, and to permit herself no change in her relationship with Hilaire,

Josephine, and Lincoln Farthing, the three people concerned.

Thinking that the whole matter was thus safely settled, she walked briskly along the Avenue des Ternes, across the Boulevard Pereire, and through the by-streets toward Aumont-Thiéville. Pleased by her minor conquest, she looked out upon the glorious September morning, giving herself to a rapt enjoyment of the velvet-soft light under the planes and chestnuts. The gravel paths were strewn with crimson, umber, and yellow leaves. Burst pods gaped, some still cushioning the appetizing-looking fruits. She picked up one giant, and rubbed the birth-fluff off him. He shone, with streaked depths of colour, like a choice mahogany box. 'I'll take him to Charles,' she said to herself; and in this mood she bought an armful of asters and chrysanthemums for her very dear friend. Antoinette, Antoinette! What a comfort that girl was! Why had she never realized it so vividly before? Her face was still flushed, and her eyes shining with tears, as she knocked at the door.

## CHAPTER VIII

## MUTUAL CONFESSION

ANTOINETTE's quick eyes at once saw the signs of excitement in Miriam's appearance and manner. She took the flowers, reached up, put a dimpled arm round Miriam's shoulder, and hugged her. It was an unusual thing for her to do; but she, too, was disturbed. And the morning was so heart-breakingly beautiful, silent and golden and fragrant with autumnal memory. The air was ancient music; it stirred and sighed with rustle of satin and flowered silk. Courtly fingers lifted the curtains, and shadows of three-cornered hats fell across the table where Antoinette was preparing lunch. Some kind of declaration hovered over the world, and the expectancy touched every heart, adding an element of craving nostalgia to the normal pulse. So even practical Antoinette, tender-hearted, hard-minded, immediate, and resolute, was stupefied with this poetry of the atmosphere, and dreamed beside her bowls of salad, her cheeses, her floured veal, her little pans that she was greasing in preparation for the *vol-au-vent*.

She had already done her shopping, and a large basket stood on the table, overflowing like a cornucopia in some Bacchic festival. Heads of celery and chicory, pale leeks, a bag of *haricots verts*, large scrubbed potatoes, a cauliflower,

added their profusion to oranges, apples, pears, and walnuts.

Antoinette was shredding the salad when Miriam arrived, and she ran to the door with a sprig of water-cress caught in her abundant black hair. The effect was delightful, adding a painter's experienced touch to the harmony of white skin, well-set mouth and nose, and intense brown eyes that caught every quality of light, and re-cast it into an overwhelming and triumphant vitality. These large brown eyes were apparently a family trait, but Antoinette's spirit had experimented further with the tradition, and this was the result; an individuality that made the casual observer overlook every other feature in the girl. One hardly heard her speak, for her charming, broken, and husky voice offered only an accompaniment to the fuller and more subtle eloquence of her eyes. They gave height to her almost diminutive figure, so that she appeared to move on tiptoe, led on by a kind of rapture. The matter-of-factness and shrewd sobriety which one subsequently discovered were almost comic by contrast.

Miriam knew at once that Antoinette was pre-occupied.

'Anything wrong, Toni?' she asked.

'Charles is ill again, stupid creature. And he is fretting because Hilaire has quarrelled with him. They are really such children; always squabbling and hiding from each other.'

'Yes,' said Miriam, hanging hat and coat in

the little box hall and following her friend into the living-room. 'Hilaire is a savage-tempered brute. I've just come away from slapping his face.'

She rolled up her sleeves as she spoke, and took stock of the luncheon preparations, asking what she could do. Antoinette ignored this, however, and stood in front of her, crying incredulously: 'What, your comrade in arms? What ever for?'

'Oh, he said rude things about Lincoln, and a wave of American patriotism must have surged over my bosom at this indignity toward my fellow-countryman.' She laughed, a little hollowly.

'Is that all?' said Antoinette.

'Yes, that's all. Only he was particularly aggravating this morning, and in front of a stranger, too!'

'But he is always rude to Farthing. One would think he was jealous.'

Miriam looked at her quickly, hopefully, and spoke with a touch of bitterness.

'You're quite wrong there, Toni.' She hesitated, then decided to postpone her evidence. Antoinette missed none of this. She smiled, took a little heart of lettuce from the bowl and held it to Miriam's tightly-shut lips.

'Don't look so grim, then, chérie. Eat this. Good for your pale cheeks! There, I see some colour already! And who was the stranger?'

'A melancholy Englishman. Tall, thin. A man who has been tilting at windmills, and is suffering

from the after effects. Oh, he is most attractively sour!’

Antoinette now laughed aloud.

‘No, Miriam; not another soul for you to save?’

‘No; I’ve got my hands full at the moment. Lincoln has lost his job. That was the cause of the explosion from Hilaire. But Mr. Wade was most sympathetic—in a rude kind of way!’

‘Mr. Wade? But who is this Mr. Wade? Is it the same one?’

‘So Charles has told you the story? I was coming to that in a moment. Yes, Mr. Wade is father’s new secretary, poor soul. But he looks capable of bearing greater burdens than that. I’ve already had the tale of last night’s adventure.’

‘You seem to have got on well with him.’

‘Toni, he’s charming. Such a contrast to Hilaire; quiet, thin—he has the most transparent hands! And the poor dear believes he is being so sardonic. Obviously a woman has hurt him.’

But Antoinette had lost interest.

‘Tcha!’ she clucked, derisively. ‘You’re an idiot, chérie! Help me with something. Look in the oven while I see what Charles is doing. He has caught cold, of course. And poor Yvonne has already rung up twice. She is terrified of Hilaire. How absurd these two men are! They bury their heads in the sand! Hilaire *must* be the model elder brother, and Charles *must* be the saintly younger brother! And they seem to believe it.

They would both be shocked if they found out about each other's love affairs.'

'Has Hilaire had so many?' Miriam's question was casual; but nevertheless her friend looked at her quickly; for the moment much the older and wiser of the two. 'He is forty, Miriam,' she said dryly.

'I should think Mr. Wade is about that age,' was the irrelevant reply.

'Curious!'

'Yes, curious.'

Their eyes met; and suddenly the tension broke. They laughed; Miriam silently and Antoinette with a low, broken chuckle that was very attractive.

Antoinette looked toward the door of the studio, and lowered her voice.

'I've made up my mind,' she said. 'Charles must not stay in Paris. He will never be a painter. It is an absurd fantasy. But what *will* he be? He is nearly thirty now, Miriam, and still pottering with his drawing, making love in a desultory fashion. Oh, we are a miserable family; worn out! Too old by far!'

'I don't see much sign of decay,' said Miriam, taking Antoinette's chin between finger and thumb and staring into her eyes. 'No, nor in Hilaire, either. And your brother Edmond has a faculty for getting on. He has married an heiress and restored the country seat. He holds an important post in the Foreign Office, and is the soul of dignity and discretion. What more do you want?'

'Do be serious, Miriam. Charles and I can't go on in this extravagant way. Look at all this!' She indicated the walls, ceiling, electric cooking stove, and the long scrubbed wood table piled with fruit, vegetables, pots and pans and bottles of wine. 'Neither of us making a penny. And father, too! He is always getting into debt, overspending his annuity. We are tragic, my dear, tragic. A relic of the past, living in a dream of the feudal system. Where *does* the money come from? Father never asks. He just lives his epicurean life, dreaming over the commentary on Pascal that will never be written, and emerging only to appease his exquisite appetite.'

'You're marvellous, Toni. What do any of us do for that matter? Look at my superb sister. Exhibit number one, the pantheress in the golden cage. She has never lifted a hand in her life, except to claw that unfortunate husband of hers. And he shed gold, not blood. Gold! Everything is gold. How long will this last? I feel something warning me; some fear in my bones. And I welcome it. Let the crash come, and we shall be forced into the open air, to breathe, to feel the wind about us, to fill our lungs with reality. Yes; I welcome it. I want to do something, too. And I know what it is!'

They were both so possessed that neither observed the little figure in the dressing-gown. Charles stood, hair tousled, and book in hand, staring at them through horn-rims.

‘Must you shout?’ he asked wearily. Both girls turned, to see him lift the book with a gesture of mock benediction. ‘Bless your enterprise,’ he continued. ‘Miriam, you must become a milliner. You have a genius for it. And you, Toni, shall marry an American millionaire. Haven’t you a spare cousin, Miriam, to produce for her?’

‘That’s what I intend to do, Charles; to become a milliner!’

‘You mean it?’

‘Of course.’

‘Why not? You’re the best-dressed woman in Paris. When you make a fortune, will you marry me, Miriam? I can then work in peace, casting off my family, and——’

But Miriam had snatched up a lettuce and flung it at him. He caught it, selected a leaf, and stood nibbling.

‘You’re in a draught, Charles,’ said his sister, matter-of-fact again. ‘Go back into bed, or you won’t be well enough to get up this evening.’

‘Why this evening?’

‘It’s father’s birthday. And if you were anything but a hopeless and impractical fool you would be helping me to prepare. Your model hasn’t come, and you would have had nothing to do this morning.’

‘Well, you know we got back too late for me to ring her up. And, in any case, with this cold in my head, how could I ask a young female to pose——’

‘In the nude,’ said Miriam, drawing the folds

of the dressing-gown together over the fastidious figure. He had let them fall in order to free his arms, which were now flung out in an oratorical gesture indicating bewilderment, disdain, and the general incongruity of the universal schemelessness of things. 'No, it would be positively indecent to associate damp handkerchiefs with bare bottoms! 'Psyche and the Influenza,' a classical study by——'

'You have a foul mind, Miriam Fletcher,' he said, turning away in disgust, and flicking off her hands as though they were spiders.

'I'm fated to quarrel with your sacred family to-day, Charles. I've already smacked your brother. I shall smack you in a moment if you show off like this. Do as you're told, and go back to bed so that we can make a fuss of you and fatten you up for the home-coming to-night.'

'Yes, I've already heard you boasting about your boxing match. You speak so loudly. I wish I could be interested. Toni, what were the children quarrelling about? I'm sorry for poor Hilaire. Everybody quarrels with him—and regrets it. I'm in that position now. I made him late last night—it wasn't my own fault—and he could not keep an assignation——' he stopped in confusion. 'I mean an appointment. And, of course, he was annoyed. Have you ever been with Hilaire for more than five minutes without annoying him?'

'Yes, I have,' said Miriam, with a significance that stopped the lighthearted conversation. She and Charles looked at each other, and then at

Antoinette. But Antoinette was peeling potatoes at the sink before the window. The sunlight fell on her hair, making it gleam with bronze and blue like a raven's wings. Her eyes were veiled in their long lashes, and the quick little face was calm and inscrutable. The two on-lookers who knew her so well might have thought that all her attention was centred upon the movement of her plump hands, knife-blade, and white tubers, shining wet and flashing in the sun.

'My lady of the miracles,' said Charles. And he took Miriam's hand, kissed it, and disappeared into the studio, shutting the door behind him. She stood looking at the door, fighting down her possessive jealousy, asking herself why she should desire Hilaire, why he destroyed all her sense of humour—or almost destroyed it. Not quite, thank God, or how could she tolerate such a situation as this? Her own sister; and knowing the meaning of the affair, a mere matter of curious appetite. But could she be sure of that? Or was Hilaire more seriously attracted? Josephine was beautiful, imperious, and—and rich. Oh, no, no! That was not fair—to him or to herself. She must wait. She must defer judgment. What claim had she? He had never asked more than friendship from her. He had never taken from her; made no demands. What right had she, therefore; what right?

Suddenly, with a spasm of fear, she looked up, to see Antoinette, the practical-minded, the imperturbable, leaning over the sink, her hands, one holding

a potato and the other a knife, resting on the window-ledge. And Antoinette was crying silently.

'What is it, Toni? Tell me, what is it?' whispered Miriam, her arms round her friend, drawing her close and pressing the dark head against her breast. Antoinette lay there for a moment regaining her composure. Then she stepped back, stamped her foot with anger, and exclaimed:

'Oh, I'm a fool, too, Miriam. And I haven't the excuse that you have. You need not be ashamed. You *do* love and respect Hilaire, and you have never made yourself cheap. But this Lincoln Farthing—I never trust him. He is mischievous. He does nobody any good. But I have given way to him. I have lent him money for some mad project which I never believed in. And I have given him more than that—more than that, in a fit of madness, drugged by his idiotic beauty, and that trick he has—I *don't* know, I *don't* know!'

'When was this, Toni?'

'Two days ago. Charles was away. And I hate myself. *Hate* myself.'

'Yes, dear, and I have done the same. And he is unsatisfactory, even as a lover, isn't he?'

Miriam was very pale as she looked quietly and calmly into Antoinette's eyes.

'You—Miriam?' It was not a question so much as a breath of utter bewilderment.

'Yes, even though I'm in love with another man. Strange, Toni, isn't it? But there's comfort in sharing one's humiliation. I still have to mother

him, and help him. He isn't grown up, Toni. He never will be, I'm afraid. I learned that the night he spent with me. I went to see him in his rooms the last time he was in trouble. You remember, he had lost his job again and had written home for money. And his mother replied, saying that his father had had another stroke, and could not work for six months. So I went, Toni, and he cried and threatened to drown himself, and implored me to leave him—and clung to me like a baby. And I stopped—and lost my head! And before next morning I lost my temper, too. He—he's indeterminate even in that, isn't he, Toni?

'Oh, I *hate* him!'

'Yes, I did too. But how can you keep it up? It is absurd, isn't it? And a useful experience. I know better how to deal with him now, and so will you. I'm sorry for all the others, though. We can't even say that he means well, can we? Because he doesn't. He's just a fated creature, with something lacking. Sometimes hardly human, and certainly not a normal member of society. He's not greedy. Indeed, he squanders everything that is given him. But he is a boat without a rudder—and he brings disaster to the rest of the fleet. You'll find that you will help him again—and then again. Everybody does. Hilaire does, my father does. Even Edmond has tried to do something for him. And that is notable! But Lincoln is never grateful, and therefore he is never under an obligation.'

‘But his *father*, Miriam. That dear old man—’ And at this thought Antoinette was weeping again. ‘He does not deserve this. So gentle and brave.’

‘My dear, he loves the boy; and that is enough for him. Besides, he doesn’t really know everything that goes on. Some day or other we may get Lincoln into a niche that will suit him, and then everything will be comfortable. Old Julius Farthing need never know.’

Both the women became silent. Their distress could find no outlet, and they could comfort each other only by a sense of experience shared, and the humiliation halved.

‘You must come out after lunch,’ said Miriam at last. ‘We ’ll go up to St. Cloud in the new car. And I ’ll ask father if the new secretary can come. We shall have to straighten ourselves up a bit then. If you stay indoors all day you ’ll catch Charles’s cold, and that will make your nose even redder than it is now, stupid!’

## CHAPTER IX

### A STUDY IN FALSE EMOTIONS

WADE worked without interruption until lunch-time. A deep silence settled over the house after Lincoln Farthing left; and the new secretary was able to give his attention to the study of correspondence and American newspapers. The atten-

tion was largely mechanical, for lack of ability to do anything else. He told himself that this idiot, Farthing, spread an infectious nervous frenzy. It was impossible now to try and master these financial columns, and letters from unknown hands. The whole business was as vague and incoherent as a scrap of conversation overheard on the telephone when one is waiting for the right number.

Wade disguised his helplessness by indulging in a little office organization. He examined the card index, arranged the letters alphabetically, and marked the financial columns with a blue pencil. The effect was not encouraging, and he was left defeated, a prey to the silence.

Once again during that morning Time effaced itself. If there are any hours in the world of ocean-depths among the motionless beds of unknown half-life, such hours now seemed to sway over this autumnal scene. From time to time Wade broke the stillness with a sigh; but the sigh itself took on stillness, and hung suspended like an embodied mood. Warm and gentle and old the sunshine fluttered, making no progress. It touched everything because space, too, seemed to be dissolved away. All sense of place and relative position left the bemused man. He sat staring into light and shadow, wondering vaguely at the almost imperceptible interplay of both. He opened a french window on to the garden, and watched a swarm of gnats, whose aëry rhythm only added to the sense of stillness.

The garden slumbered lush and overgrown. The grass, being long, was sap-coloured rather than emerald, and mournful begonia blooms, surviving the summer, added to the wistfulness and melancholy of the quiet place. Wade ventured out, and took a few turns up and down the mossy path, stopping to stoop and smell at a belated rose, or to gaze at a clump of Michaelmas daisies caught in a dust-mauve disorder spun out of their own nature and the silver-sad spider-webs flung over their heads. He was conscious of rowan-berries, burning against a background of fading foliage. The air was still acrid with wood-smoke drifting perhaps from the bonfire in the Tuileries. Ineffably sad he found it; the breath of exile and lost hope, opportunities squandered and decaying now like all this wreck of opulent summer.

Unable to bear this attack upon his senses, Wade returned and shut the door, to find Mr. Fletcher sitting at the table and looking over the letters. His thin, papery face seemed drier than ever. The drive had brought no touch of life to his cheeks. Looking up slyly as Wade stepped forward, he spoke with a quiet deliberation that was half sarcastic, half amused.

'You find your duties overwhelm you, Mr. Wade?' He nodded toward the garden beyond the french window, and Wade took this gesture as a reprimand for being found idle.

'One might almost think so,' he said, determined not to take the snub, if one were intended. That

he could not be sure of, for the old gentleman now became almost ingratiating.

'We must go into these things together. But I too feel idle to-day. Remarkable for me, Mr. Wade. I have spent my life training myself to ignore myself. As I said to you before I went out, I have no use for moods. I should want to perfect myself like a machine. The day of superstitions is over. Emotion is a crude and violent thing of the past. It must not, cannot play a part in our present world. We are too intricate, too closely—but what do you think, shall we take our lunch out there, in the sunshine, and make the last of the summer? I think it would be pleasant. I will get you to tell them, and let Josephine know; if you will be so good.'

Wade accordingly rang the bell, gave the instruction to Jacques, of the green baize apron, and then sat down at the table with Mr. Fletcher, who began to instruct him in the right procedure with the correspondence and the newspaper files and press-cuttings of financial matters relating to America, Great Britain, France, Germany, and China. The old man's voice rasped on, asthmatic and peevish, warmed occasionally by flashes of animation as he became enthusiastic in expounding his office methods. Wade, though giving only half-attention, soon found that they were not very complicated. Mr. Fletcher was no Wall Street hustler, and his successful dealings in the world's money market depended on native ability rather than an

elaborate organization. 'He's just a crazy old privateer,' Wade thought. And he was grateful; for he anticipated a more interesting relationship if it was not to be standardized by some ready-made technique of office procedure.

He now made an effort to give all his attention to his employer's instructions; but though he stared doggedly at the shrunken hands discoloured by brown blotches under the skin, he could not command the familiar mood of despair which was engulfing him again. He recognized it at once as his immediate reaction to every effort, no matter how trivial, of body and mind. Always, he had discovered, he would rather refrain than act. Even to raise an arm, even to turn over the page of a book, were actions that presented insuperable difficulties that destroyed all pleasure in movement, or interest in reading. And he knew, now, that these moods of black melancholia and sloth would be followed by a savage self-contempt turning out upon the world in cynical and savage denial of all values, all sensibilities. During these reactions, he saw himself and his fellow-creatures only as greedy animals prowling in the jungle of life, lustful and bloodthirsty.

He lived in dread of these destructive tides which swung in upon him more and more frequently. He recognized that during the past year his old, real self had hardly emerged at all between the floods. If only he could find the cause! No private griefs, no personal disappointments, could

stir any sane man to such horrifying resentment or such abysmal indifference to the joys, pains, and surprises of daily life. Nothing! Nothing mattered; nothing existed. Rocks and stones and trees could be touched with hand or foot; but hand and foot had no authority; their evidence was automatic. As for the more intangible structures of the mind—memories, tender associations, ideals, hero-worships, faiths, and enthusiasms, these warm wellings-up from the fountain of youth—where were such in a multi-verse where even the senses were liars?

He was startled from this reverie by a touch on his arm. Mr. Fletcher was standing over him, peering down like a sympathetic old eagle. A pair of spectacles were held in mid-air. Wade looked, swallowed, and tried to jump up, but the hand on his sleeve detained him.

‘You startled me, my dear young man. If I may intrude—but it is against my principles—I can see that you are in distress. It is useless for us to try and work while you are so—so lost in perplexity. I wish I could assist you.’

Overcome by a revulsion of feelings, like a drowning man grasping at the most unpromising support, Wade sank back into his chair and looked up at the gaunt figure before him. He found himself speaking, not knowing how to control himself, throwing all discretion aside as he began to stammer out a half-coherent account of his life since leaving the army.

'After the War, during the Occupation, I was stationed in Cologne,' he said, 'and fell ill there. After months in hospital I married an English nurse. That was my mistake. We came to England, and with a Government grant I managed to qualify as an architect. Then came a rough time. I could get no commissions, and we struggled on for two years very near the border-line. By the death of a relative I inherited nearly a thousand pounds, and invested it in house property which I converted into flats. We lived on the rents for two more years and then I sold at a good profit. That was the beginning of a run of good fortune. I repeated the experiment, and also branched out, buying country cottages and modernizing them. I was very keen on the work itself—and left the financial side to take pot luck. It seemed to need no attention, for we made money hand over fist.'

He paused, while Mr. Fletcher looked at him reproachfully, saying as he returned to his chair: 'Ah, yes. That is the fatal mistake. And you learn too late. Cursed emotion again, spoiling the machine. With precision, automatic precision—where would you have been to-day, Mr. Wade?'

'It wasn't so much the money,' was the lugubrious reply. 'But we began to spend. Trying, perhaps, to cover up the memory of those hard years. My wife wanted a house—then a car. And children arrived—two of them; and that meant servants and a cottage by the sea. I didn't mind. I thought I was capable of making more and more

since it seemed to be necessary. I bought rashly—and then prices began to fall. But my wife had tasted comfort and would not be warned. You understand? I began to see our life from a new angle.'

He hesitated, wondering if he were wise to continue. He was possessed by this weak impulse to pour out the story which had been pent up for so long: though he knew that this old man's sympathy was probably merely spasmodic, a matter of nerves.

'Then a new element entered,' he began, 'my wife went for advice to a friend, a man she had met at one of her parties. He gave her more than——'

But Wade had gone too far. Mr. Fletcher suddenly grew frightened, and threw up his hands.

'I quite understand. I quite understand,' he squeaked in a thin voice. 'You need not tell me more. Dreadful—dreadful! You must not expect—ah! there is luncheon. Come along, Mr. Wade, we have lost a lot of time. The human element. Really, really, you must fight it down if we are to work together. I am most distressed—you disturb me profoundly.'

And he hurried into his closet, behind the false bookshelves, to wash his hands, leaving Wade chagrined and annoyed with himself for having been such a weak-headed fool as not to stop when his instinct warned him. But self-pity had got the better even of instinct, and here he was on his first morning at loggerheads with his chief. A good

beginning for a tactless and clumsy—but what use in calling himself names? The old man was as much to blame, standing there silver-haired and pitiful, tempting him in a weak moment. What did it matter, anyway? Let the moments come—and pass. The phantasy would go on, the mad procession of puppets, miming and mocking. And he was one of them, entitled to have his fling at the end of his thread. But curse the hand that held the strings so irresponsibly; if it *was* a hand, and not a nerveless, clumsy paw.

He stopped himself at this day-dreaming, walked across the room, and opened the window, waiting there obsequiously for his chief to come out. Then he followed him into the garden, where a table was laid for three. The magnificent Josephine was already sitting there, reading as she waited. The sunlight, broken in golden disks trailing dust-mote streamers, fell in patches over her head and figure. And as she looked up to greet the two men it shattered itself into splinters of colour among the diamonds hanging from her ears. Wade looked, recognized the jewels, and saw, too, that she had noticed his glance. He found that he was amused by this.

## CHAPTER X

## A SYMBOLICAL ACCIDENT

THE process of the excellent lunch restored Mr. Fletcher's equanimity, and he chatted easily with Wade and his daughter, whom he had now introduced as Mrs. Gould. He asked Wade's opinion of the wine, a *Vieux Collioure*, which was sent up direct from a vineyard in the Roussillon plain. He took only one small glass, but that was sufficient to put a little Christmas-apple glow into his transparent cheeks. Mrs. Gould was less abstemious, and the subtle geniality of the wine crept into her eyes, her voice, and even touched her throat and the opening of her bosom with fairy fingers. Her aloofness gave place gradually to a kind of dusky indulgence toward the men. In the course of conversation she occasionally fondled her father's hand, or leaned over the table to add an intimacy to the words she offered Wade.

He, too, found the wine potent. It crept through his veins, warming his unaccustomed English blood, whispering messages of comfort and urging him to material resignation. The present moment became isolated, and he grew bold toward his miseries, turning from them to contemplate with a purely physical satisfaction this remarkable woman. What a match for any man! There was something Elizabethan about her; a carelessness,

a sense of unscrupulous generosity and lavishness, an indifference to propriety or other people's cautious rights. Wade stared, fascinated, at her firmly moulded hands, whose fingers and nails suggested a predatory vigour.

Throughout the meal those ear-rings attracted him. Even while talking freely—perhaps too freely—he was asking himself how they had reached her. Had Hilaire de Vaudrac sent them, or had she sought him out and received them from his own hands? Obviously there had been a reconciliation, for Wade fancied that he detected a sense of unusual secrecy in her manner, as though she were inwardly warm and smiling with the memory of very recent transports. He enjoyed the cynical thought that he was being bathed in the backwash of that emotional tide. It fed both his sense of contempt and his recklessness.

Mrs. Gould was pouring coffee when the maid came out to say that Miss Fletcher was on the telephone.

'Miriam! My love,' explained the father. 'Will you go to her?'

'I guess I'm too busy with these cups,' said Josephine. 'Would you mind, Mr. Wade? I reckon she won't have anything important to say. She was lunching with Antoinette.'

Wade got up at once to find himself standing in a confusion of colours compounded of mental fumes and external blends of sunlight, autumn rusts, and fires, dove-breast filterings of leaf-smoke, and

sparks from the spectrum of those symbolical earrings. A gleam of mischief danced in Josephine's eyes as she detected Wade's condition.

'I'll keep your coffee as black as hell,' she said; and he smiled in response. An intimacy was already established.

When Wade returned with Miriam's request for the use of the car and for his escort, Josephine at once warmly seconded the proposal.

'I reckon I'll come, too,' she said, looking at Wade. He was at a loss what to do. This seemed a quaint way of earning one's daily bread. Was the job always to be so nominal as this? He began to make a protest about his work, but Mr. Fletcher waved a hand, deprecating such scruples.

'No, no, I'd be glad if you would go. It will do you all good. A tedious business; Channel crossing, and inauguration. Very tiring. It even tires me. I shall rest this afternoon. There is nothing urgent to-day. Indeed, there is nothing at all. The world seems to be waiting. Ominously. Yes, I think—ominously. What will happen, José? What will happen, you foolish girl? You must not be so reckless—you look resplendent to-day. And who knows—Rome may be burning already. But I warn you; and you, Wade! I warn you I feel danger. The markets of the world are too still; there is something unhealthy about it all. I should not be surprised if——' he paused, laid his hands on the chair rests, and pulled himself up, then continued

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irritably: 'But go! Go! You can do nothing this afternoon.'

Josephine chuckled and kissed him; then turning to Wade she said that she would be ready in ten minutes. He bowed and followed her and her father into the house. While waiting it occurred to him that he had not been shown to his room. He was not even certain if he was intended to stay here or at rooms of his own. Even now, fortified by the wine, he had not enough determination to ask, but stood, irresolutely toying with the papers on the table, while Mr. Fletcher fussed about the room, cutting and lighting a cigar and retiring again to the closet to wash his hands after this infectious act.

Wilson stood by the Daimler and greeted his two passengers with a military salute. As he was tucking the fur-lined rug over their knees, he looked into Wade's eyes. His gaze was a little too much that of the perfect servant. The oversensitive man asked himself what the fellow meant; was it impudence or friendliness? One might think that Wilson suspected him of being a fraud.

'Comfortable, sir?' asked the man demurely, as he was about to shut the door. Wade instantly recognized the tone of the sergeant-major protecting his officer; that unique understanding, half admonitory, such as no other relationship in the world offers. Confidence returned: and a touch of some remote nostalgia for faraway times; days of hell and danger that were tangible and almost com-

panionable, in a life that was simple and direct. He could almost welcome it again, with its school-boy irresponsibility, its excitement and conceits. Subsequent events had made him temporarily forget the horrors, the intrigue, the back-stair tricks.

'I think we are, Wilson,' he said, trying to give the indistinct murmur a military crispness.

'You seem good friends,' said Josephine, as the car moved.

'Yes, we came from London together, and found that we were in the same division during the War.'

'Well, that's a pleasant coincidence,' she said, offering him a cigarette from a beautiful Paul Cooper shagreen case. He suddenly felt mischievous.

'I seem to have been surrounded by coincidences since I left London.'

'How's that?'

He then re-told the tale of his adventure with the de Vaudracs, concluding with the incident of the ear-rings. She listened lazily, lying back in the corner of the car, half-turned towards him, one gloved hand playing with the arm-strap.

After he had finished his story, silence fell between them. Each cast furtive glances at the other, the man trying to gauge the effect of his outspokenness; the woman wondering what capital she could make out of his knowledge of her relationship with Hilaire de Vaudrac.

'Does it amuse you?' she said at last, 'or are you disgusted?'

'Certainly not disgusted; amused perhaps—a little. That's what one usually feels about other people's experiments.'

They were both smiling, warmed with an understanding that needed no other expression.

'So you think I am a woman who makes experiments?' She frowned slightly, and the effect was more regal than she intended. He decided to be careful. 'To what end?'

'I've no answer to that,' he said. 'I can only echo your question. It suits my life admirably. *There is no answer!*'

'No, we're fools to ask. I learned that long ago: and I suspect that you did, too. Am I right, Mr. Wade? Hasn't the faith been knocked out of you? I guess it has. I can see—I can see!'

She had become almost vehement, sitting up and turning to him, looking into his eyes with just a shade too much of earnestness. He refused to be impressed, though he could not resist the physical attraction of the voice and presence of this woman.

'That's no unusual occurrence,' he said, trying to be matter-of-fact. But she would not let him.

'Marriage has let you down, too. I can see that. Arn't I right, Mr. Melancholy Cynic?'

'Come, come!' he said, half-offended by her impertinence. 'We all have our troubles, I suppose. But it's no use making a fuss about them. I——'

'No, but you've sworn to get even with life, have you not, Mr. Wade? Don't deny it, or I shall

think you're a fool. We both are rebels together. I recognize an ally! You smile. That's your answer. And you cannot fail to appreciate——'

'I appreciate nothing now,' he said suddenly, interrupting her with a passion that immediately strengthened the attraction between them. 'Nothing you do, or that anybody does, surprises me or draws my criticism. I've just no feelings in the matter, and no interest.'

'So it seems,' she said ironically; and with that he stared out of the window, trying to break the spell. She was content to relapse into her laziness, and they travelled in silence. As the car drew up before the studio door, she spoke again, giving him her hand as he assisted her to alight.

'In spite of all that, I like you, Mr. Wade. Put me amongst your exceptions, see? Somebody who is utterly detached, and can give and take indiscriminately. That's your line now, I reckon?'

'I appreciate it,' he said, smiling at her. He was puzzled, and preferred not to commit himself. But he allowed her hand to remain in his a little longer than was necessary, and he felt a slight pressure that might have been either a provocation or a welcome.

The door opened before Wilson had time to knock, and two ladies appeared. Introductions were formal and Wade relapsed into his habitual defensiveness. He had already gone too far, committed himself too much for one day. But even so, he had to sit beside Miss Fletcher during the

ride to Saint-Cloud, and force himself to offer a minimum to the conversation. His mind was active. He was aware of the presence of the newcomer who sat unseen behind him, but he would not allow himself to be inquisitive. Nobody with any ear for phonetics could resist the attractiveness of that voice, with its perfect articulation slightly veiled, but also accentuated by a huskiness of tone that became more pronounced whenever Mademoiselle de Vaudrac spoke with animation. A sixth sense told him that she was sitting upright, small and self-possessed, with a perfect composure reminiscent of her younger brother's graceful and innocent manner. Once or twice Wade dared to turn round and verify his intuition. But between him and the object there flowed the aggressive personality of Mrs. Gould. Every time he looked round he met her eyes. He was distracted, and his interest in the young Frenchman's sister was put aside for future consideration.

That future soon materialized. Leaving the car in the paved courtyard by the *caserne*, the party of four crossed the formal gardens and climbed up the path and steps leading to the terrace. They stood enjoying the view of Paris, one of the most pleasing sights in Europe. The autumn sun fell across the city, accentuating the grouping of buildings and the medley of colours. The effect was like a back-cloth by Lovat Fraser, softened by the September atmosphere into a more melancholy romanticism. The towering chestnut trees formed a natural pro-

scenium arch, and the one man and three women stood like dwarfed actors at the forefront of this vast stage, their cues lost before the grandeur of the setting.

'I know only one sight more impressive, though less beautiful,' said Wade, 'and that is the view of London from the woods of Dulwich. That is almost overwhelming in its sense of massed humanity and burden of history. It annihilates one, and creates a presence of fear and awe that drives one to despair.'

Not until he had finished this little guide-book speech did he realize that he was standing next to Mlle de Vaudrac. She was listening gravely, and at the sound of the word 'despair' uttered in so heartfelt a tone, she turned her head and looked at him, with the directness of a child mesmerized by a fairy-story.

'You make me afraid of London,' she said. 'I don't think I could live there.'

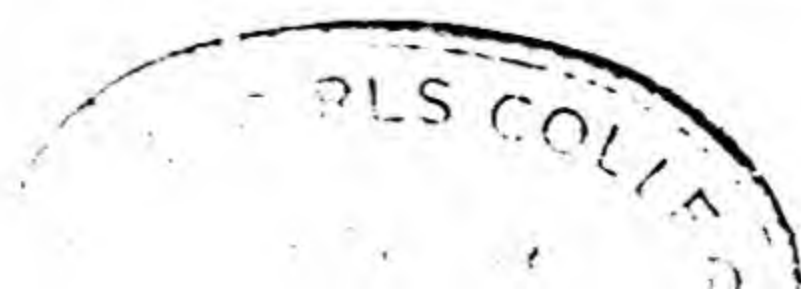
Her solemnity caused Mrs. Gould to laugh and exclaim:

'No, Toni. I'm sure you couldn't.'

'Why not?' asked Miriam. 'Toni needs only half an hour in the waiting-room of a railway station to change it into a home.'

'That's a nice compliment, Toni. What an affectionate pair you are! You make the rest of humanity feel far outside the magic circle.'

'José, you are a jealous tigress. Did you ever know a woman approve of her sister's friends, Mr. Wade?'



Wade could not reply immediately, for during the talk between the two sisters, he had been studying Mlle de Vaudrac, who was looking from one to the other of them, uncertain whether to take them seriously. Her eyes were eloquent with the inquiry. Wade looked into their depths and felt again that unfamiliar sense of sympathy which had moved him when confronted with her brother's dilemma at the door of the peasant's cottage. Again he forgot his cynicism, and spoke impulsively; so warmly that Mrs. Gould looked at him with a gleam of anger.

'Never! Never!' he said. 'But there cannot be——' He was interrupted by Mrs. Gould, who turned away as she spoke.

'Don't except present company. That's too commonplace. Antoinette is a danger to society; believe me.'

'Josephine! You are wicked,' cried Antoinette, laughing and taking her arm. 'Come along, we shall get chilly. Let us see the colour in the woods. I want to take home some leaves for the studio. You and Mr. Wade can pick them, José. You are both so tall; far above my head.' And she walked a few paces on tiptoe.

Wade contemplated the two figures as he followed with Miss Fletcher. He was content to be by her side. She was a quiet, peaceful person; one who could be eloquent in silence. He glanced occasionally at her serene face, admiring the broad forehead and wide-set eyes. Each time she was conscious of his glance, she met it candidly, and smiled.

Obviously she liked him, and was generous enough to let him know it. His excited nerves calmed, and he began to enjoy with her the pleasures of the woods, contributing an equal share of observations of particular corners and vistas of beauty.

The world was wrapped in soundlessness and solitude. The intrusion of these visitors only accentuated the hush and mystery of the place at that moment. From one high-arched avenue to another the humans strolled, following the tree-architecture built up by the combined genius of Time and *Le Nôtre*. The afternoon air was laced with crosslights hung like festoons between the trees. As a weft on this intangible warp, innumerable winged creatures hovered, rising and falling in obedience to some rhythmical impulse that was part of the autumn symphony. From time to time there fell upon this luminous silence the twittering of robins, plaintive and lonely. Occasionally a leaf fell, twirling round and round until it touched the ground, light as a figure in a ballet. Gold, amber, sere or green, they fell with soundless grace out of the multi-coloured arches above, flashing as they passed through the horizontal rays of dusty sunlight. Wade put out his hand and caught a yellowing chestnut leaf, offering it solemnly to Miss Fletcher, with 'Here's a fortune for you.' She took it, and thanked him so seriously that they both smiled.

'Mademoiselle de Vaudrac is very like her brother,' he said.

'You mean Charles?'

'Yes—and no! I think I mean both. They all have something—what is it? But I've not been so interested for a long time. One can't help offering sympathy.'

'No, even though it is not needed. I doubt even if Charles, that dear, helpless creature, needs it. I believe it is some trick of countenance, a family feature. You will, no doubt, meet the father. He has it, too, oddly disguised. The only exception is the eldest brother, Edmond. He is different. Perhaps that is why he inhabits another world. He has married successfully, and has been absorbed into his wife's family. He seldom leaves it, and is always openly ashamed of his aristocratic father and brothers and sisters when he *does* appear!'

'You clearly don't like him!'

'Oh, I shouldn't say that. One would not dare to do either. He is a very discreet official. But one resents, somehow, his being the brother of Antoinette.'

'Ah, yes; I can imagine that.'

'You can?'

They looked at each other quickly, and to Wade's amazement she took his arm.

'Why?' she asked.

'Perhaps because she is the sister of Charles—and—and Hilaire.'

'Yes, *both*.' She spoke quietly; but her thin cheeks were flushed, and her hand pressed almost intimately on his sleeve. First one sister, now the

other; but what a different drama these approaches represented! He told himself quickly that he was impervious to both; but he knew he was not honest.

They were interrupted by Antoinette, who had halted beside a little clearing in the wood, in the midst of which stood a beech tree with wide fans sweeping down, touching the dog's-mercury that covered the ground. The tree was still green, but the leaves at the tips of the fronds were deeper and harder in hue, shot with bronze, so that they had the quality of metal.

'I should like those,' said Antoinette.

'And you shall have them, chérie,' mocked Mrs. Gould, touching the girl's cheek with one finger. 'Give me your pen-knife, Mr. Wade.'

He offered to cut the boughs, but Mrs. Gould insisted.

'No, no! I shall serve the princess. But you can help me. Bend this back while I cut it. So!'

She reached out, knife in hand, indicating which bough she wanted. Wade grasped it, pulled it back, and she applied the knife. But the wood was tough and slippery, and she became annoyed by its resistance. Shifting her footing, she applied the knife nearer to the place where Wade's hand held the bough. The blade slipped, slid up the stem, and cut into Wade's thumb and wrist.

At the sight of blood, she dropped the knife, gave a cry of dismay, and looked round helplessly. Wade tried to be polite and ignore the wound, but

the blood spurted through the fingers with which he clasped the injured hand.

'This looks like a blighty wound,' he said, trying to be jocular. But he was feeling faint, and had to lean against the tree. He was sufficiently alert, however, to see Mrs. Gould staring at the blood with fascinated eyes, and this revelation roused him, half to anger, and half to a savage enjoyment.

'See what you've done!' he said, huskily, looking at her. She returned the look, made some inaudible reply, and put her arm round him, snatching the handkerchief from his pocket.

'No, no!' he said. 'You have done enough.'

'Let me finish what I've begun.' She refused to relinquish him, and tightened her hold upon his wrist. 'Take care, you'll stain your clothes,' he said, half struggling against her.

By this time the others had crossed the clearing, to find Mrs. Gould grasping Wade by the arm and attempting to bind the handkerchief round his wrist. He looked up, pale, and saw Antoinette slip between him and Mrs. Gould. She picked up a piece of stick, knotted it in the handkerchief, and twisted them round the wrist to make a tourniquet. Quietly she ordered Mrs. Gould to hold it, and was at once obeyed. Then she searched in her bag, but could not find a handkerchief large enough. Nor could the other handbags produce one. Meanwhile, the blood was streaming from the wound, and Wade found himself swaying. He leaned

back against what he thought was the tree; but it was Mrs. Gould's shoulder.

'Come, then,' she whispered, and he felt her strong arms round him. He saw dimly, not sure whether he was deluded, that Antoinette hovered before him. Suddenly she stripped off her coat, unbuttoned her dress, and with a pair of nail-scissors cut the shoulder-straps of her camisole and dragged it off. Then she cut the fine linen into strips, and a few minutes later the wound was bound securely and the hand suspended in a sling.

Ashamed of his weakness, Wade braced himself by an effort of will, and suggested that they should now proceed to collect beech leaves. But the women insisted on getting back to the car, where the wound could be dressed more scientifically from the first-aid box. The knife was left lying amongst the blood-stained weeds.

As quickly as possible they made their way through the wood, Wade walking light-headedly between Antoinette and Josephine. Wilson at once produced iodine and bandages, and Antoinette redressed the wound. This caused pain and further loss of blood, with the result that Wade, leaning back in the seat, quietly fainted.

## CHAPTER XI

## ACCIDIE

By the time that the car arrived at the Hôtel de Vaudrac, Wade had regained consciousness, and sufficient presence of mind to be able to apologize to the ladies. He found himself sitting between Mrs. Gould and Antoinette, with Miss Fletcher half-turned on the pivot-seat, gazing at him with solicitude, a bottle of smelling-salts in her hand. The position was so ludicrous that he was seized by a fit of laughter.

'I must explain,' he said, 'that I served in Flanders with my friend Wilson who is driving us, and I never once fainted in the whole four years. I say this to save my self-respect. You now see the softening effects of peace. *Vive la guerre!*' And he again gave way to such laughter that Mlle de Vaudrac laid a hand on his knee. It was an instinctive gesture of caution; but the effect was immediate. A sense of quiet sanity seemed to flow into him at that contact, and his half-wilful, half-cynical laughter subsided. For once he felt safe. The emotion was so foreign that it frightened him; but even so he could not escape from it. The habitual practice of derisive self-examination which had grown upon him so stealthily during recent years was for the moment broken. To feel safe! He had not known that reaction to the outside

world since he was in the trenches more than ten years ago!

He sat silent, wondering how long this magnetic hand would remain in contact with his body—his spirit. The experience was that of a suffocating miner who has stumbled unexpectedly to the foot of the shaft, and inhales slowly and incredulously the pure air penetrating from the world of light above. So completely was Wade concentrated upon this involuntary gesture from the little French-woman, that he ignored the warmth invading him from the other side, where Mrs. Gould sat with shoulder, side, and limb pressed close to him. She was speaking as the car stopped before the door.

‘I guess you ’ll have to lay off from writing for a while, Mr. Wade. It ’s your right hand. Father will have a word to say to me about that!’

‘My first day, too!’ said Wade, so lugubriously that the two sisters laughed.

Mrs. Gould’s prophecy was true. When Mr. Fletcher heard of the accident he fussed and fumed, grumbled at his daughter for her carelessness, and finally followed her upstairs and knocked at Wade’s door.

‘My dear man!’ he cried, when he saw the white face and the blood-soaked bandage. ‘This is absurd! Absurd! What are they thinking of? Who is attending to you? We must get a physician! Josephine, I won’t have any risks taken! No doubt the knife was rusty—we must send him away to a nursing home where he can have constant attention.

This is a surgical case, and the house is not suitable for it. Where is Miriam?' and he ran out to the landing, calling hysterically for his younger daughter.

'Please, sir,' pleaded Wade, when Mr. Fletcher shambled back wringing his hands, and fumbling at his spectacles as he leaned over to peer fearfully at the wound, 'don't alarm yourself! It's only a flesh wound, I assure you. Looks more messy than it really is! I shall be as right as a trivet after a rest here. I lost a little blood, that's all. Not quite so fit, physically, in these piping times of peace.'

But the old man would not be reassured. This subject of health and disease was his mania, and could not be so easily dismissed.

'Lost blood?' he piped, his voice cracking with anxiety. 'Good God, woman, don't stand there gazing at the man! I'll get him away at once. Don't you realize the danger of infection—in this crazy old house—and a country that has no sense of hygiene!'

'Nonsense, father! You forget it produced Pasteur!'

But the imperiousness of the daughter, triumphant in most things, could not stand against the old gentleman's mania. His sunken eyes glinted with an obstinate, baffled light of fanaticism, and he shook his finger at her so violently that Wade, sitting dumb with apprehension, imagined that he heard the bones rattle beneath the fleshless skin.

'My dear sir,' he essayed, trying to interpose a reassuring word; but Mr. Fletcher ignored him, and continued haranguing his daughter with increasing self-abandonment.

'I *won't* be contradicted! You are a complete slut. Your slovenly carelessness was the cause of this accident, and now you try to make light of it. You should be ashamed of your conduct. But you have no shame! Go and telephone at once for a bed; find a nursing home. Quickly—you hear me? Where is Miriam?—Miriam! Miriam!' He was now running to and from the corridor, each time pushing aside the open-mouthed Jacques, who was evidently trying to deliver a message.

'What is it?' he said at last, his paroxysm of fear and rage subsiding.

'Monsieur! Mademoiselle is already telephoning for a doctor. He will be on his way immediately. And there is a message from Mademoiselle de Vaudrac. She invites you and your family, and Monsieur the Secretary, to dinner to-night, to celebrate her father's birthday. Her brothers will be there.'

'What's this—a party? I can't think of that now. We must get this matter settled. I have to-morrow's work to think of—and I must be reassured about this wound, Mr. Wade. In any case, José, it is impossible for him to go out to-night. I can't permit it, I won't. I'm sure the surgeon won't—surgeon did you say, Jacques?'

'Yes, monsieur, *surgeon*!'

'Oh, Miriam—here you are. I've been calling you—now we can talk a little sensibly. What have you done—is he a reliable man? Now I want you to get into touch with a good nursing home. This wound should have constant attention, and we have not the staff or accommodation to give it here.'

'No, father,' said Miriam. 'We must talk it over with the doctor first.' Her voice was carefully modulated, and she looked significantly at her sister, who was standing tapping a foot in silent revolt. With a shrug of the shoulders, Josephine turned and left the room.

'Did you ever know such a woman!' exclaimed the old man. 'She just walks out, having created the mischief. Where does she get this spirit from? I won't have her here. She must go and live in her flat. Her conduct is——'

'Father, let us see about getting Mr. Wade safe and comfortable first. I think he ought to be helped to bed.' She smiled at Wade, inviting his co-operation in her diplomacy. He was only too glad to do something, for he had been watching this tea-cup storm with increasing uneasiness, wondering what point of crazy ecstasy that eccentric millionaire might reach. And he was uncomfortable, too, to know that his own wretched carcass was the cause of all this toil and trouble. The distress, imposed upon the recent loss of blood, made him quite weak, and beads of perspiration stood out upon his forehead. Forgetfully, he tried to wipe them away by raising the bandaged hand in

its sling, with the result that he left a great smear of blood across his brow.

At this, Mr. Fletcher started in horror, crying out, 'Please! Please! Take care, Mr. Wade! My dear! My dear! Don't *let* him! Oh, really, this is a dreadful thing——'

'Come along, father,' said Miriam, taking him by the arm; 'Mr. Wade needs to be kept quiet, and we must let him rest until the doctor comes. I'll see to everything. There shall be no possibility of danger. We shall neglect nothing——'

With such persuasion, uttered so confidently, she beguiled her father out of the room. Ten minutes later she returned, followed by Wilson, who carried a tray with a glass and a bottle of cognac.

At this Wade lost his temper. 'Damn it, Wilson,' he cried feebly, 'are you coming too to make a fool of me? What's all this fuss about? I've never heard——'

'That's all right, sir. I should take it easy if I was you. It *was* rather a nasty gash; and I mean to say you don't look so robust that you can afford to risk a touch of gangrene.'

'Good Lord, man, you remember the old jargon well enough. Well, thanks—and thank you, Miss Fletcher,' turning to her and tottering as he stood, 'You are really an——'

'Please be good, Mr. Wade, and sit down, and be docile. I'm so sorry about it. It just happens that father is somewhat abnormal on this one matter—his own health has never been good, and

that may have caused this obsession. But if only to placate him, and to make the peace between him and my unfortunate sister, I implore you to be submissive. Of course, it is absurd about the nursing home, but you can rely on me to frustrate that idea.' She meanwhile poured out a noggin of neat spirit and stood before him, waiting for him to be seated.

Half incredulous, he obeyed her, accepted the glass and swallowed the brandy at a gulp. He had taken nothing since lunch, and the fiery spirit at once acted upon his brain, so that the room rocked and he was held prisoner in his chair, half conscious, half stupefied, realizing only that his identity had vanished, and that his one measure of recognizing himself was by the pain in his wounded hand and the numbness in his arm.

He murmured something inarticulate to the doctor who appeared half an hour later. The unwrapping of the wound was so painful that he regained control, and saw the doctor clearly as a majestic figure with a glossy, square-cut beard and enormous, high-bridged pince-nez.

The procedure was oratorical rather than clinical, but nevertheless the cut was examined, cleaned with care and dexterity, and re-dressed. No doubt impressed by the establishment, and scenting a lucrative connection, the doctor took a serious view of the matter, and insisted that the patient should go to bed in order to avoid running a temperature. Wade therefore found himself in a strange room, in a strange house, surrounded by people whom

twenty-four hours ago he had never seen, people who now were so solicitous for his comfort that he was driven almost to a fever of embarrassment.

It was arranged that Wilson should remain that night to valet him, and act as nurse while the Fletchers were away at the dinner party. During the hour before their departure Miss Fletcher came in once or twice to satisfy herself that he had all he needed. A dish of chicken purée was specially prepared so that he could manipulate it with his undamaged hand.

While the glorious day lapsed into twilight, Wade submitted to Wilson's services, undressed, and got into bed. He found himself unaccountably tired, and listened to Wilson's laconic remarks with but a feeble attention. He was grateful for them; they struck the only familiar note in this new environment; and for once he was glad to accept the familiar. After he was comfortably propped up with pillows—Wilson discovering a talent for this sick-nursing—the semi-helpless man asked for the lights to be switched on. He was curious to examine the room which was to be his headquarters for some weeks, at least—for he did not imagine that Mr. Fletcher would tolerate so sinister-handed an assistant for longer.

The room was large and light. Even at this time in the evening it had a character of cheerfulness. The last gleams of the cloudless sunset waved to and fro across the wide window panes, behind the rhythm of the garden trees swaying in

the evening breeze. Bronze bars, swinging before the serene curtain of the western sky, threw edgeless shadows that moved about the room like pinions rising and falling. The effect was at first soothing, but as darkness deepened Wade began to feel uneasy. He tried to interest himself in Wilson's talk while the man was folding up his clothes and removing the half-eaten supper. But he found himself bored by war reminiscences and motor talk.

'I think I'll have a sleep,' he said, and Wilson took the hint, telling him to ring the bell if he wanted anything.

Then, for the first time since lunch, Wade was alone. Lying lost in the silence, he tried to reduce the confusion of the day's experiences to some sort of order. Above his head was a pink-shaded lamp. It showed a room of soft contours, and smoothed away the baroque ornamentation over door and ceiling, the cornice and plaster mouldings, the studs and protrusions of the rococo furniture. He stared at the marble mantelpiece supported by identical twin caryatides. Their breasts gleamed with matronly splendour. He listened to the ticking of the buhl-cased clock, whose face was so heavily decorated that one would have to approach to within a few inches in order to read the hour and minute. Over the mantelpiece, and reaching up almost to the ceiling, hung a picture which he took to be a 'Judgment of Paris' in the manner of David. It might even have been an original,

commissioned by an ancestor of the house of Vaudrac.

Wade stared at the three goddesses posing chillily before the negligent young Trojan. They were so alike in their conventional nakedness that Wade sympathized with the hero's dilemma. He imagined himself in the same position. Forced to choose, on whom would his favour fall: Josephine, Miriam, or Antoinette?

The three names, slipping so unexpectedly into his mind, startled him. He glanced round the room guiltily, as though his thought might be surprised by an observer. But only the silence betrayed him. The house was empty. He looked at the watch that had been transferred to his left wrist. Half-past seven. Everybody must be gone. He was glad. A slight sense of disappointment died away. He would have been glad to meet that attractive young Frenchman again, to re-kindle at those eloquent eyes and deprecatory gestures the feeling of sympathy so long absent from his heart. If only he could *feel* something, stir the dead embers to life. But it was not possible; and perhaps better so, for the world now could have no more power over him, offer no more hopes, bestow no more disappointments.

Was this negative gratitude a hypocritical emotion? He stirred uneasily on the bed, and the movement sent a pulse of pain through his arm. Which of these three women interested him most? He refused to consider that magnetic gesture of

had not believed that such utter disillusionment could be possible, or that a human being could continue to exist where life, within and without, had lost all value.

He recollected now the amazement, and then the horror, with which he had looked into books which had formerly been food and drink to his soul. There were certain writers with whom he had made himself so intimate through their work and their recorded lives, that he had been sure of a secret, personal relationship with them. Dante, Milton, Shelley, Wordsworth, these inward-looking giants, had been more real, more vital to him than his flesh-and-blood associates. Reading them had been adventure, life itself, full of a passionate excitement that affected every sense and idea, so that he would pass imperceptibly from their pages to the contacts of daily life and find the world as they had depicted it.

The universe shone perpetually at morning-time, exalted with rising light, and solitary with youth. How often, sitting reading, he had been forced to look up from the book, giddy with thought and spiritual illumination; to press the pages down with the palm of his hand, as though shielding himself from their fire, 'and read no more that day.'

All through the war that fervour had remained in his heart. The mud, the lice, the blood and disease, the hell of noise; none of these engulfing forces could quench the glory of his youthful faith. His world of ideas remained immaculate.

But after that came the years of peace, and the degradation of the armies of heroes. He was one of them, the millions who had been promised fabulous prizes that could never materialize. Then indeed, and not until then, the sense of safety and sanity broke, letting in such a floodtide of doubt that not only society began to crumble but also the deeper articulations of the human spirit, the inner integrity of the individual upon which the fabric of society is built.

Thinking upon these first intimations of disaster, Wade turned from side to side, tossing like a petulant child. The torture took a historical turn, tormenting him with a pageant of the bitter process of disillusionment. It had begun with his conceptions of public life. His political ideals, so nobly set upon the Platonic creed of the sacred nature of statecraft, were the first to be assailed. He saw the work of the politicians, their feeble, amateurish attempts to cope with the new social forces and problems; their impractical stupidity and fettering legal drags. He discovered them to be all alike: 'blind mouths' uttering phrases that might as well have been spoken on gramophones.

From that, his belief in democracy became tainted. Who were the people who could believe in these politicians, who could elect them, first one party, then another, to cope with the highly technical urgencies that now beset the world? Only a colossal, collective ignorance, a dumb, blind brute,

responsive to a slave's stimulants, could be content to follow such leaders. Democracy became the mob, fitly represented by its spokesmen, the orators, the newspapers. The whole order of things was chaotic, brutal. Underlying the supposed integration of even the most civilized community, ruled the law of the jungle: each for himself. The most rare conduct, in public service, in religious life, became suspect to the ex-idealist. He saw in all motives, in all action, only a form of self-glory, a manifest of hunger and greed and lust.

Sick with this poison, Wade had tried to lead his private life. He de-capitalized his spiritual assets, concentrating his waning faith upon his immediate concerns and intimate relations. He became an individualist, returning, by the road of scepticism in morals and anarchy in politics, to the practice which nineteenth-century liberalism had founded on religious principles.

Finding thus a motive, he had begun to make money. This involved such hard work that he had to neglect his reading. For years he dipped desultorily into his books, with an increasing bewilderment, and a fear that he preferred not to face. He had no need to; for he could reassure himself with his success in the world. One enterprise after another succeeded. The post-war plutocrats wanted country cottages and farms, and he was able to supply them with the necessary comfortable adaptations. He had to become prodigal of time and vitality. Buying, rebuilding, and selling

kept him busy from morning until night, for seven days a week. For five years he never took more than an occasional week-end off. His wife was left alone to appreciate the change in circumstances.

She had been a nurse during the War, and remained with the Army of Occupation after the Armistice. Wade, idling in Cologne for six months, had succumbed to a mysterious bout of neurasthenia and anaemia. She nursed him, and on his recovery they married and he was demobilized. Lean years followed, while he was qualifying and looking for commissions. The difficulties were aggravated by the arrival of two children. The poor wife had all the odds against her. Her girlhood had been spent slaving in a war-time hospital. A tired woman, she married a tired man and then faced poverty, child-birth, and the care of infants.

At first, when money began to come, she was incredulous. Then she began to sip at the nectar. She enjoyed her first taste of leisure and comfort. She indulged, timidly, in a few minor luxuries, added others, consolidating them as necessities, and so gradually enlarged the sphere of her hitherto thwarted appetites. She soon began to make up for lost time. Large houses, more servants, a seaside house for the children, a car; then social activities, parties, theatres, cocktail-friendships. She thrived on the new life; grew younger, prettier, perhaps a little fatter. But nevertheless she was well corseted, and the increased comeliness only

added to her attractions, especially as she was now always well dressed.

She had now much time to herself, and there were no apparent economic realities to hold her back. Her husband was always at work. That fact became a law of nature. Her interests had always been physical. That was why she had been such a solicitous nurse, and such a good mother to young babies. But now the babies had become children with mental needs, and she preferred to turn them over to other people. It was not to be expected that thus late in the day, and with such a sudden wealth of distractions, she should begin to share her husband's inner life, especially as that inner life was for the time being submerged. She even forgot that it existed.

All went indifferently well, even though during the later years Wade found his clientele falling off. It was even easier to buy country property. Prices were falling, and this tempted Wade. He invested recklessly, and spent a lot on adapting his purchases to suit his fashionable market. In the meantime, unfortunately, that market had vanished.

Mrs. Wade regarded this impersonal fact as a very personal betrayal. Her old professional technique returned, and she nursed her grievance so well that it became a very healthy one, with ramifications in all directions. She discovered that her husband had been neglecting her. She accused him of being extravagant, impractical, and deceitful. She refused to believe that he was on the

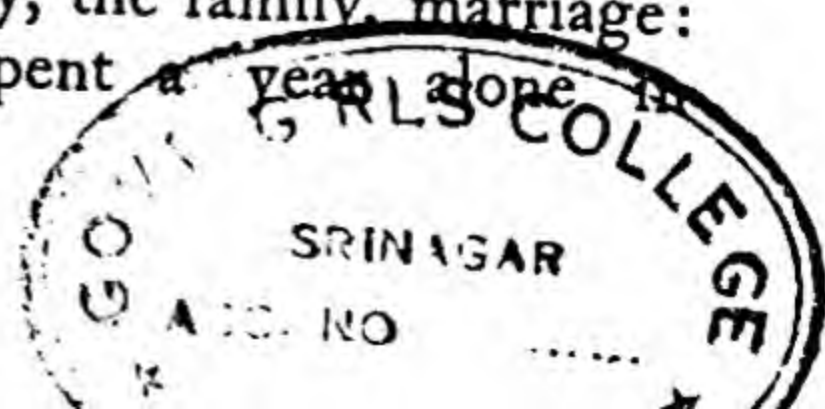
verge of a crash, and demanded to know whom he was supporting with the sequestered money.

In this dangerous and lonely position, full of suspicions and with a sense of having been cheated, she naturally sought for sympathy. She found it in the person of a dashing young superman who owned a motor sale-room, and was very jolly and consoling.

Wade at first was homely and conceited enough not to believe it; but her departure with the children soon made him face the facts. For a year he did nothing, perhaps because he was too busy trying to stave off bankruptcy. Then she wrote to inform him that she was going to have another baby, and that 'Harry,' who belonged to a county family, wanted to regularize things if possible. On the other hand, if Gregory divorced her, it would ruin Harry's business and family prospects.

In an access of self-torturing bitterness—perhaps a form of moral suicide—Wade rose to the occasion, and gave his wife the necessary evidence for divorcing him. The court, of course, was ignorant that her pregnancy was the result of her own adultery. She got her divorce, but not in time to legitimize the child. Again she blamed Wade, and started proceedings for further alimony at the same time that his creditors and the Inland Revenue Department stepped in.

In this manner, Wade's last stronghold was stormed and taken. Society, the family, marriage: all were shattered. He spent a year alone in



London, trying to meet his debts, and taking a perverse pleasure in immolating himself before his ex-wife's demands. During that time, in periods of idleness, he tried to return to that bright and glorious world which he had deserted some six or seven years before. He opened his books again. The pages lay before him like the whites of a blind man's eyes.

At first he could not believe it. He told himself that he was tired, overworked. But he could not delude himself for long. There were the meaningless words, the burnt-out phrases, to persuade him—the only persuasion now that they *could* offer. He turned from poetry to philosophy, thinking that perhaps with the advent of middle-life he needed a new medium for his enthusiasms. But his mind refused to dwell for a moment with an abstract idea. A stifling impatience overcame him when confronted with passages of pure reasoning.

At this moment of physical weakness the recollection returned; he saw himself sitting perverse and angry amid the personal relics saved from his home, twisting his self-dismay into forms of resentment and condemnation of the labours and ideals which had once been the main purpose of his life. Half in earnest, half wistful, he had made himself sneer at the things which were the very foundation of his character. For a time, this blasphemy against his own spirit gave him a spurious courage, and he found some strength in the Byronic pose. But these supports soon crumbled, and he was left

on the brink of nothingness, to function automatically, under deadened nerves, moved only by the inertia from his former faith.

Such now was the melancholy aspect over which his thoughts strayed. He tried to stop himself, to sink back into the torpor which had protected him since the shock of that spiritual wound some two years ago. He had thought that nothing more could happen, that in this condition his life would quietly drag on, to end 'not with a bang, but a whimper.'

But he realized that this was not so. The screw was being given another turn, and he was falling deeper into a fresh adventure of despair. Here was something worse. Even his diabolic pride, his pleasure in perversity, were being dragged off him. Under this flaying he lay staring up at the ceiling, his face an impassive mask, bloodless except for the thin streak about his lips where his teeth had broken the skin. He was only half conscious, his knowledgeable self lying abject *beneath* his body that seemed, by comparison, to be free. The dissolution of self, begun by a chance train of thought, proceeded with increasing speed. Falling! Fading! These sensations now became almost physical, accompanied with such an unspeakable agony of spirit that he tried to roll over and bury his face in the pillow.

But he only rolled on to the wounded hand, which responded with a local agony of its own. The two joined forces, thrusting him down, down

into the gulf. There, in the final humiliation, he lay listening to his own misery, faintly surprised to find himself still an identity. He murmured his own name, 'Gregory Wade,' and its strangeness made him groan. Nature could stand no more. Worn out by the last ravages of this disease which the schoolmen called *accidie*, Wade lay trembling and sweating on the bed, and towards midnight passed into a calm sleep.

## PART II. NEW BODY



## CHAPTER XII

### EMOTIONS AT A BIRTHDAY PARTY

LINCOLN FARTHING was disconcerted by his encounter with Wade. He had never before been treated with such coolness. Thinking it over as he sat in a taxi on his way back to lunch on Montparnasse, he decided that Wade was a hard fellow, one of those self-centred customers who never gave themselves away, never gave anything away, in fact. Farthing could not get on with such people. They made him feel a waster, a slacker; and nothing distressed him more, for he was full of unexplored ambitions. He was convinced that he could be many things, if only the world of fools would not conspire to thwart him by putting all kinds of niggling obstacles in his way: examinations, donkey-work, routine, subordination, and other such uninspired and uninspiring factors.

He leaned back in the cab and cursed because he had not a cigarette. Why hadn't he thought to buy some?

Yes, that was his trouble. Perhaps people were right when they said that he was scatter-brained. Oh, well, damn them! If they knew how bitterly he felt about it! At any rate, he was intelligent enough to recognize his own faults, and he resented

always being told about them by other people. None of them was so bright, after all. He had not yet met anybody whom he could acknowledge as his better. Painters, writers, scientists, engineers, film-folk, he moved amongst all the professions, and he felt able to improve upon the ideas of all the acknowledged experts and masters. They were all so *tied down*. That was the trouble. They couldn't see the wood for the trees; slaving away so unimaginatively at their various occupations, impervious to life around them.

During these cogitations he was still groping in his pockets, and by chance found a loose cigarette which he straightened out and lit. Damn clever that, keeping an odd one about him. Not such a lack of forethought, after all. What was the good of always slanging oneself? Method was all very well, but any duffer could be methodical. He took no credit to himself that he always arrived by intuition. That was the way he was built, and people must either take it or leave it at that.

Well, they were decent enough. Miriam had been a brick. She really was different from the rest of the world. She understood him, and never put him into a temper or made him feel he was a misfit amongst mankind. Even the old people at home could not be exonerated from that. He knew that his father meant well, but the old chap had always been immersed in his own work, and the example of such infernal industry was a constant reproach. As for mother: that trick she had

of looking at one in perplexity and fear, well, that just knocked the bottom out of everything. It made him seem a criminal; and then he lost all sense of self-respect. Nothing was worth while, and he might just as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb.

And then there was the de Vaudrac family. They, too, were a decent crowd; not always pushing and shoving to the front, or despising everybody who was a little uncertain, a little diffident. Look how understanding they had been about this last crash. Hilaire, even, had not uttered a word of reproach; and he was a practical and far-seeing fellow. A bit stuffy, no doubt, rather an old woman in his fads and fancies; but always willing to help, to recognize that one was capable of something.

And then there was Antoinette. At the thought of her he felt a glow of affection. She was so different from Miriam; not nearly so intelligent, of course. A little smile of satisfaction played over his face, giving way immediately to a frown of bewilderment. Good God, he thought, what am I to do next; after that last scene with her?

The problem was too complex, and he dropped it. Five hundred francs which she had lent him lay in his pocket, and he felt in a generous rather than an inquisitive mood. That was why he had indulged in a taxi back to lunch. The comfort of it, the sense of affluence, restored him after that humiliating encounter with this fellow Wade. Where did the chap come from, anyway? He only

made old Fletcher even more formidable. At the thought of Fletcher, Farthing shuddered.

The mood of generous expansiveness continued all day, and he gave no more thought to the job which he had thrown up. The world was full of activity, and he could turn his hand to anything—especially of an administrative kind. All in good time. The old people at home need not know anything about this switch-over.

He felt so reassured that he pondered whether he should not take up painting again. It was in his blood; and with his father's technique as a draughtsman! And Farthing was a name that already commanded attention amongst the art-dealers. Why, Charles de Vaudrac was five years younger: and look what a fish *he* was! Wild enough with the girls, and none too industrious. But always friendly and polite; a bit quiet, perhaps, almost chilly, when one talked to him about his painting, and gave him a few hints. But then he took himself so absurdly seriously in that. Still, he was to be envied; even though it did make him seem rather a fool. Why not drop in and see him to-night, and talk about this idea? He might be willing to share his studio. He was none too well off, and such an arrangement would help with the rent.

Farthing spent the afternoon sitting outside the Dôme, embellishing his new scheme. He then went to his room and slept for two hours, waking with his enthusiasm still intact. He would go at once to the Rue Aumont-Thiévill, and put

the matter before young de Vaudrac. He felt sincerely benevolent, buoyed up by the idea of beginning a new career, and of helping de Vaudrac to struggle along.

It was about seven o'clock when he knocked at the door. He could hear sounds within, but nobody opened to him. 'Blast them, are they deaf?' he murmured, impatient to break the news. He pressed the bell several times, and then banged the knocker. The noises inside ceased, and he heard Charles's voice call. A moment later the door opened, and Antoinette stood before him, looking very beautiful in a low-cut evening dress that revealed perfect shoulders and arms. She was holding a loose waistbelt, and evidently had been summoned in the act of dressing.

'Oh, my God!' thought Lincoln, nonplussed by her beauty. This was a different woman, completely removed. He was at once humiliated and resentful.

'Am I too early?' he said, snatching off his hat.

'Too early for what, Lincoln?' she asked, her eyebrows raised. The action carried a warning—and a defence.

'Well, I've decided what to do, and I wanted to talk to you both about it. It's a great idea, and will——' but he decided not to press the point about helping Charles. That dress somehow did not fit in with the suggestion. He ended lamely, with a touch of pathos that made Antoinette smile and step back for him to enter: '~~—will put things~~ right.'

'We are having a little party to-night,' she explained, walking before him into the studio.

Something about her quelled him. He was at a loss what to say or do.

She was a stranger, who might be twenty years older than himself. And yet, only three days ago, in this very room—but she was speaking again, quietly, amicably, but all the time repelling him, warning him. He was quite definitely frightened, and stammered something about butting in. Yet at the moment of proposing this retreat, a devil of perverseness urged him to bluff his way forward. He took hold of Antoinette by the elbow, moulding it amorously with his fingers; looked round, and stooped, brushing the tiny hairs on her forearm with his lips.

'No, no more, Lincoln,' she said. Her voice was hard and dry, and she shivered and stepped back. 'That was a mistake, my friend. I apologize to you—and I ask you to forgive me.'

'What do you mean?' he pleaded, unable, or refusing, to understand. His protruding eyes were bright and startled, like those of a hare suddenly caught in a trap. His lip was thrust forward, and trembled as though he were going to cry. Antoinette swiftly studied him, noticing everything about the tall figure now stooping so dejectedly before her. Her gaze finally rested on the almost absurdly classical nose, whose chiselling was accentuated now that it was white and bloodless. She repented, and her fear vanished. He

was so obviously not dangerous. She was no longer angry with herself. For the first time since he had left her she felt easy-hearted, and this relief expressed itself in a grateful gesture toward his harmlessness.

'It is my father's birthday,' she said. 'You will stay to dinner? Yes, of course.' Her voice was motherly, and for the moment he was willing to accept the position.

Charles entered, in shirt and trousers, his collar fastened only by the back stud. He stood, with a white tie in his hand, looking helplessly from his sister to the visitor.

'Oh, Farthing,' he said, 'I must lay a place for you. Now, how many is that?' And he turned to the big table, counting the places, using the tie as a pointer. 'Papa, Edmond, Vivienne, Hilaire, Monsieur Fletcher, Mrs. Gould, Miriam, Monsieur Wade—and us!'

'But Monsieur Wade is not coming, Charles, he is in bed!'

'Ah! Of course, poor fellow. But I laid a place for him. You can take it, Lincoln!'

Antoniette made a quick exclamation, and hurried to the table.

'No, no!' she cried, 'that would be unlucky! I must move it!' And she snatched up knives, forks, spoons, glasses, and napkin from one place, acting so rapidly that she dropped a fruit-knife. It stuck upright in the floor, and the three people stood watching it as it quivered there. Then

Charles looked at his sister, surprised; and from her, less openly, at Farthing. His eyes, apparently so oblivious of all objects, seemed to become suddenly veiled, and he turned away from Farthing, to assist Antoinette. Solemnly they transposed two places, passing the cutlery and glass to each other across the table, Charles, meanwhile, having hung his tie over his shoulder.

‘There!’ he said, ‘will that suit you?’ He looked at his sister as he spoke. ‘Father at the head, Vivienne at his right hand. Edmond on his left. Hilaire next to Vivienne, then Mrs. Gould, and I will sit on her right hand. That was Monsieur Wade’s place, next to you at the bottom. And this side, Edmond, Monsieur Fletcher, Miriam—no, me, then Miriam—but now Farthing, then Miriam. Is that good?’

He looked for approval, and sneezed violently, groping for his handkerchief, and losing his tie in the effort. Antoinette laughed, ran and picked it up, spun round him like a child, fastened his collar, and put the tie round his neck. Finishing off the bow with little adjusting pats, she looked at him seriously.

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘that is better. *Much* better.’

Farthing looked on at this spectacle too much concerned with his own chagrin to appreciate what was happening, or to enjoy the picture of brother and sister finishing each other’s toilette. For while Antoinette was adjusting Charles’s tie, he had flicked a clean handkerchief from his trouser

pocket, shaken it open, rolled a corner into a point, and gravely pencilled out a little extravagance of powder from above the bridge of her nose.

'Toni,' he said, 'that motion of your arms and fingers fills me with despair. If I could only capture it! Did you notice, Farthing, how exquisite the play of muscles from wrist to elbow, and the——'

But Antoinette silenced him by putting her hand over his mouth and pinching his ear. The last thing she wanted was to have her physical person discussed with Farthing. But he did not notice her embarrassment, nor Charles's further quick glance at his sister's face as though to corroborate something which he had learned by a ruse.

As a result, he certainly was not forthcoming toward Lincoln Farthing, and he listened with a most exasperating half-politeness as the latter broached the matter about which he had come. Charles looked more and more weary and depressed while Farthing expanded, gaining confidence as his straw-fire imagination blazed up under the draught of his own eloquence.

Both Charles and Antoinette moved about between the studio and their adjoining bedrooms, Farthing following them as he talked, raising his voice during the moments when he had to address one in each room. From time to time Charles paused to look at him out of lack-lustre eyes, but never stopped to give full attention. With studied concentration he gave himself to arranging a still-

life study in fruit, carefully considering each piece—apple, pear, grapes, pineapple, peach—as he added it to the large unglazed bowl on the centre of the table.

Farthing had explained the preliminaries of his scheme, and he now passed to the further stages when the policy would have to cope with such elements as fame and wealth. Without a sign of laughter, the industrious brother and sister pursued their preparations. Antoinette finished her toilette standing in the doorway of her room, by fastening a large pearl to each ear. The action again displayed the rare shapeliness of her arms, had Farthing cared to remark it; but he was now quite entranced with the unexpected new details which enriched his scheme while he was explaining it. Standing beside a golden-shaded standard lamp, he looked very graceful and handsome, his unruly red hair gleaming like flames, and his face a warm olive colour. He was more faun than human, a harmonious embodiment of his irresponsible talk with its almost incredible egotism.

Antoinette, setting two four-branched candelabra on the table, stood back to assure herself that all was complete. The studio certainly looked very attractive at this moment. Charles's working paraphernalia had been stacked into one corner and hidden behind a huge gilt-canvas screen some eight feet high. Over one end of the screen hung a Japanese mask, and from that same end, at the foot, protruded a large feather brush. Antoinette

was too pleased with her table to notice this slight defect in the camouflage. The lights were cleverly arranged: the standard lamp a little behind, to the left of her father's chair, throwing a mellow light across that end of the table. For he liked to see a glint in his wine, and to enjoy his food with eye as well as palate.

The rest of the studio lay in shadow, except for the model's dais, where two carboys filled with giant sunflowers were beam-lit from a tall funnel-shaded lamp. The penumbra from this corner of the room touched many objects into an interesting half-life; stacks of canvases, a baby-grand piano, a silversmith's bench, an English library-chair, stools, rugs, and anthracite stove. Only one picture hung on the wall; it was a portrait of Mrs. Gould, commissioned by Hilaire, and paid for in advance. The finished article, however, had so frightened him that he constantly made excuses for not taking it away.

Farthing saw it now, glaring at him with a sort of animal satisfaction, the rich lips parted, showing a glint of teeth. Faced with derision, malice, and such evidence of remorseless appetite, he turned away, and cried pettishly:

'Charles, my dear boy, you *must* get rid of that dreadful thing. What made you do it? I could never work here under that criticism.'

Charles purred at him, creeping up and standing at his side, contemplating the canvas in its plain oak frame.

'My dear Farthing,' he said, 'you almost hurt my feelings. That is my one masterpiece. I intended no satire, and for once painted with my eye on the object. How rarely I do that! It is not often that my conscience gets the better of me. But confronted by such a——'

'Charles, you are trying to be dangerous,' said Antoinette. 'Do please go and open the door. I hear father on the step grumbling about our inaccessibility. Lincoln, give me your hat.' She hurried out to the little vestibule, which was divided from the studio by a heavy curtain, now drawn back. Neither brother nor sister had offered one word of comment on Lincoln's scheme, which he had elaborated with such excitement and confidence. He stood alone, shaken with misgiving, biting his nails and frowning at the exquisitely arranged table.

His annoyance was engulfed by a still greater one: a mature, high-bred, instinctive annoyance that possessed unlimited sources of self-expression. The Comte de Vaudrac ventured into the studio as though he were shrinking into a cold bath. He was attended by a sleeker version of himself; his son and heir, Edmond de Vaudrac. The father wore a decoration—perhaps to commemorate his sixty-fifth birthday—but the son gave the impression of being even more decorated, though he wore only the customary tail-coat and white tie. The father was the taller man, in spite of his stoop. His hair and moustache, both snow-white, hung about him like widow's weeds, seeming to veil the

smouldering fire of his large black eyes. These again were half hidden by heavy lids, so that when speaking, or summoning himself to notice another person's presence, or when responding to the one or two themes that really warmed his spirit, he had to exert some machinery of the will in order to raise these canopies of melancholy. When he did so, however, the result, in fire, in matter-of-fact and devastating directness, could be surprising. At such moments he could reveal, as it were in a distilled form, the various forces of personality possessed by his four children: Edmond's cold duplicity, Hilaire's rage, Charles's innocent scepticism, and Antoinette's candour. From the first moment he gave the impression as of some rare vintage, a product of long-tried rebellions against an even longer-tried tradition, like the poetry of Paul Valéry.

He advanced a few paces into the room, and stopped. He had seen Farthing. Turning to his eldest son, he raised one eyebrow, thus giving his face a slightly weary, slightly interrogative cast. Edmond at once bent his portly figure in the direction of his wife Vivienne, a woman with an enormous nose, deep and close-set black eyes, and a miserly mouth. She raised her lorgnette and looked at the sunflowers.

'Antoinette tells me he has been unfortunate. What? What? Did you hear, papa? I am so sorry, Mr. Farthing. You must be distressed, especially in this difficult time. Hilaire tells me

so much—but you have come to our family gathering?’ She nodded her head as she spoke, and twitched her nose with a sniffing motion that caused her faint moustache to stretch inquisitively. This pantomime was the only acknowledgment she ever made of other people’s conversation. Her interests were too tense and too few to permit of any other participation.

Edmond de Vaudrac was not in the habit of knowing the friends of his brothers and sister. He was annoyed to see this outsider present at a family function, and to show his displeasure he bowed stiffly and turned to say something to his wife, perhaps to apologize to her.

The Comte, however, approached and spoke to Farthing.

‘And how is your father? Better, I hope? I have seen little of his work lately in the exhibitions, and I regret it. His taste is impeccable—but, of course, I need not point that out to you. You must indeed be proud of——’

This exquisite torture was relieved by the arrival of the Fletchers, who at once attracted the Comte’s attention. He had a deep respect for his rich tenant, and now approached him with a cordiality that almost dispelled his disapproval of the studio. The two aristocrats, the French and the American, fraternized like two wintry trees bending before the same icy blast. They enjoyed each other’s irritability, each feeling reinforced against the onslaught of the younger generation.

Mr. Fletcher had merely nodded to Farthing, and then ignored him. But Miriam was now present to salve the poor fellow's wounded pride. He turned to her and whispered:

'I'm awfully sorry, Miriam! But I butted in to-night without knowing—I'm an utter idiot. It's just my luck. But you know I've been feeling fed up with this business of jobs. I realize now that old Dubois had his point of view. I expect I just riled him every time. It probably wasn't his fault at all. All the methods of the whole concern were so completely obsolete, and you know what an outspoken beggar I am. Why don't you give me some of your patience, Miriam darling? You wonderful woman—you make me sick with myself. Really—I've been going through hell the last few days.'

Miriam eyed him coolly. What she had learned that afternoon prevented her from falling too quickly into her usual mood of leniency. He was surprised at her reserve, and felt it the more keenly since it followed the several set-backs he had received since knocking at the studio-door.

'Come,' he coaxed, 'you're not going to turn me down, too? Just at the moment when the whole thing is being put right?'

'Why, what do you mean, Lincoln? How put right?'

And he then repeated the details of his scheme, leaning over her and talking rapidly. But at this repetition his enthusiasm was somewhat forced.

The gallant idea was certainly now a little bedraggled, and Farthing was losing heart.

'I've put it to Charles and Antoinette,' he said, ruffling his hair and fidgeting with his tie. 'Oh, I say, by God, I'm not dressed for this show, either. Look here, I'll clear out——'

'You can't do that *now*,' she said, with an unpleasant emphasis that made him stare at her in dismay. What had happened? He had never known Miriam like this before. A sudden suspicion made him look quickly from her to Antoinette and back to her again; so quickly that he learned nothing, and was certain she had not noticed his glance. But he was wrong.

'You had better go into Charles's room and brush your hair,' she said coldly. Her grey eyes were expressionless. He could read nothing there. As usual, when confronted with the fruits of his own conduct, he turned sulky and childish. With a certain bravado, he slouched across the studio, kicking against the arm-chair so that Mr. Fletcher jumped and looked up reproachfully.

'That unfortunate young man!' he said to the Comte, who closed his eyes, opening them a moment later to behold his son Hilaire dancing into the studio, Antoinette on one arm, Charles on the other, all laughing loudly.

'My children,' he murmured to Mr. Fletcher, as though offering an apology. Vivienne, from behind her husband, scrutinized them through her lorgnette, and turned her back, preferring the fine

indolence of Mrs. Gould, who had seated herself in a low chair before her own portrait, which she contemplated with detached admiration.

For ten minutes, during which Antoinette handed round sherry, there was general conversation, Hilaire having seized his father and kissed him on both cheeks, and also saluted the hands of Mrs. Gould, Miriam, and more reluctantly, his sister-in-law. This last patted him approvingly, as she would the bear at the Jardin des Plantes, for he was making money. That was a faculty she understood and approved. Her husband did not make money; but he was a creature apart, above criticism; and in any case she had enough wealth to furnish his career, which was progressing satisfactorily enough.

Even at the present convivial moment he seemed to be aware of this, though unbending with a professional graciousness that caused Charles to venture on one or two innocent and demure gibes that nobody except Antoinette noticed. Calling him to help with the meal she managed to whisper: 'Idiot! Leave him alone, or you'll make Hilaire angry again. You know how loyal he is to all of us. Where would *you* be if he weren't?'

'Toni,' said Charles, looking back from the kitchen door as he was disappearing into the studio with two plates of her mushroom soup, 'you are a thoroughly dishonest woman, in spite of your candid face.'

In the act of ladling out the next two plates for

Hilaire to carry off, she stood thinking, wondering what Charles meant. Was he serious, and was he right? That disarming innocence of his. Dear, lovable, and just a little treacherous—or perhaps not so much that as elusive, protean. But for a moment she saw Charles not as the youngest but as the oldest of the family, as subtle—and perhaps as cruelly impartial—as her father.

Dismissing this short-lived reverie, she lowered the ladle into the soup, and saw Hilaire standing beside her waiting. Stooping over her, he touched her hair with his moustache.

‘Thinking, Toni?’ he murmured, his huge voice reduced to a mouselike squeak, and his flesh-bolstered eyes moist with affection.

‘Perhaps,’ she said, smiling up at him.

‘What is it?’ he asked. ‘Eh, what is it?’

‘Only that I’m so happy to have us all here.’

‘Yes, child, it is wonderful. But who asked that young wastrel Farthing to come to-night—of all nights? I should have thought he’d have made himself scarce, at least until I’d found him another job.’

‘Be kind to him, Hilaire. He is unlucky again. He came here to see Charles, knowing nothing about the party. I can see he is uncomfortable. Where is he now? Do go and find him. And old Mr. Fletcher looks very worried to-night. You’ve heard about the accident to Mr. Wade?’

‘Accident? What accident? How should I hear? Why, what is it?’ And for the rest of

the evening he was asking further questions of one or other of the three women, his uneasiness intimating that they were a set of careless fools not to be trusted with the care of such a gallant Englishman.

The general interest in Wade, his personality, and the unfortunate incident on the first day, made the topic during the meal.

This was not Farthing's idea of a successful party. Unless he was the life and soul of a festivity he considered it to be a failure. He sat through the first part of the meal without speaking. He was frightened of Mr. Fletcher, and therefore could do nothing on that side. The old gentleman once or twice addressed him, but only to say something about Julius Farthing, whose recent illness had deeply grieved him. This solicitude again touched Lincoln on a raw spot, for he was none too comfortable about his father's health, and the effect upon it should news of recent events reach La Genevraie, where the old couple lived.

Mr. Fletcher's inquiries gave a second lead to the dinner-talk, and the meal proceeded between these two interests. Antoinette was devoted to the old engraver. She had inherited from her mother a small farm at La Genevraie, and Julius Farthing rented the house from her, living there with his German mistress (in a relationship of over thirty years' standing). Antoinette kept for her own use a cottage, which she was now proposing to enlarge in order to start a hotel. This matter, too,

was discussed between herself, Charles, and Hilaire. The Comte and Edmond were incredulous, the former because the matter was outside the bounds of his world of possibility; the latter because his dignity was in danger of being compromised. A de Vaudrac as a hotel-keeper! The father could not believe it; the son was afraid to.

The Comte was also engrossed in his meal, for he appreciated Antoinette's cooking. Her *vol-au-vent* were certainly superb. They eclipsed everything else: the mushroom soup, the *coquilles*, the salads that crimped and crackled in the mouth, the *sabiole* which she rendered unique with a touch of *advocat*. How she made such pastry on a small electric stove was a miracle. It seemed to hover round the content like a cloud, giving just the right hesitation to the palate so that the thick creamy viand within might be thoughtfully savoured! The silver dish went back (Charles carrying it) a second time to be refilled, Antoinette laughing with joy. During the pause she ran round behind her father to attend to his glass and brush a flake of pastry from his shoulder. The old gentleman caught her hand, pressed it against his cheek, then took up his wine and rose to toast her.

'The best in Paris,' he said, 'and that means the best in the world. And to think that my own child—Antoinette, you have the hand of a fairy. It is a sufficient *dot* in itself!'

Vivienne de Vaudrac clucked with contempt, twitched her nose and moustache, and said very

audibly: 'Huh! The coming in is very different from the going out!'

The comte slowly raised his eyelids and looked at her. But there had been several revolutions in France, and the bourgeoisie was not afraid of the old aristocrat. Her gaze narrowed, and she squinted at him along her nose as though she were sighting a gun at the barricades.

'It pleases you to be cryptic, Vivienne,' he said. And then he smiled with malevolence, and brushed a drop of wine from his moustache, leaving a white, long-fingered hand raised after the action, perhaps in readiness to emphasize his rebuke.

Edmond, who during the course of the meal had become more and more embarrassed by the ungenteel, we might almost say Rabelaisian manners of his family, now saw cause to be offended. He stood up, coughed, tugged at his waistcoat, surveyed the committee, and began:

'I must ask your pardon, Vivienne. I understand from my father that, as head of the family, he——'

He got no farther, for there came an interruption from an unexpected source. Farthing, nursing his suppressed wrath at the scant attention he was receiving, had eaten little and drunk much. Now, in keeping with his contradictory character, he suddenly vented his rage by a burst of infectious good spirits. Leaning in front of Mr. Fletcher—who was panic-stricken by this hitch in the family harmony—he stared drolly up at Edmond

de Vaudrac, his ginger hair and under-lip both hanging forward and throwing the rest of his face into shadow. The effect was burlesque.

'My dear sir,' he said, his words somewhat blurred. 'This is not the League of Nations. This is a hap-hap-happy little birthday party, and I'm glad I'm here. Am I right, Mr. Chairman? Am I right, Mr. Secretary, Mr. Absent Secretary, ladies and gentlemen?' Then raising his glass: 'I drink to the secretary, to his absence—or I shouldn't be here. Have you ever experienced the tragedy, my dear sir,' turning to Edmond, 'of being the unbidden guest in another man's chair? No, sir, you have not, sir. Then I congratulate you. Let us sit down together!'

As though hypnotized, Edmond sat down. For a second nobody dared to breathe. Then Hilaire choked, spluttered, seized his neighbour, Mrs. Gould, by the arm, and burst into volcanic laughter. One by one the others joined in, until even Mr. Fletcher was nervously chuckling, and murmuring: 'Bless me, astonishing young man! Very resourceful, very resourceful!' while the Comte cried into his napkin, and Miriam gratefully pressed Farthing's hand under the table.

This incident gave a new life and orientation to the party. It was now led by Farthing and Charles, who let themselves go with such a harlequinade of buffoonery that even Edmond and Vivienne were drawn into the fun, the latter confiding to the Comte and Mr. Fletcher that Farthing was a droll

and very talented fellow, if only—— Following her sagacious nose, they nodded agreement, and decided that something must be done for him, and that Hilaire should be consulted again.

Miriam, overhearing this benevolent talk, determined to strike while the iron was hot. Sitting on a stool at her father's feet, she suggested that while Wade was unable to work, Farthing should come in for a few days and help with Mr. Fletcher's correspondence. She was surprised when her father made no demur. Warmed by this success, she approached Hilaire, who had avoided her during the evening. The morning quarrel was forgotten in a council of action. Meanwhile, the object of these deliberations, perhaps sensitive of them, behaved like one guided by a wise angel. He had forgotten the project with which he came to see Charles and Antoinette. He had forgotten also that Antoinette's money lay in his pocket. Inspired by the wine, the food, and this unexpected return to the limelight, he lost all sense of obligation and therefore of inferiority. Like a man with a dual personality, he became transformed into a second self, so charming, so considerate both in act and word, that Antoinette almost forgave herself for her foolish conduct a few days earlier, especially as that folly was shared by Miriam, whose sagacity and common sense she so much respected.

## CHAPTER XIII

## THE CHEMISTRY OF BLOOD

WADE woke late next morning. He passed from sleep to a state of semi-consciousness in which he gradually recognized the fact that he must be ill. He found himself on his back, his head hanging down over the end of the bed. This proved to be an illusion; for there he lay, propped up conventionally enough on a bolster and a pillow. He put up his hand and touched his forehead. It was hot and clammy.

Slightly alarmed, he tried to sit up, but at that instant a dark shape—he saw it distinctly as a panther, black and lithe—leapt, and pinned him down. He felt its weight over his breast, over his mouth, smothering him.

Alarm now gave place to terror, and with a frantic groan he raised his arms, knowing that he must thrust the beast away, or be destroyed. But with this effort he recognized that the apocalyptic shape was not tangible. Memory had taken this form, memory of the hellish experience through which his soul had plunged during the night.

‘Did you call, sir?’ asked a voice, from another world.

Wade then knew that his eyes were shut. He opened them, and saw daylight filtering through the net behind half-drawn curtains. Wilson stood

beside the bed, and the meagre light fled away even his scanty flesh, refining him to a mere bony spectre of anxiety.

'Call? No! Did I?' said Wade, groping for words. He found no comfort in seeing Wilson, for fear and a sense of desperate danger paralysed both body and mind. He could not even ask himself if he was ill. He could do nothing but wait, like an animal cowering beneath some inexplicable agony.

Wilson dared not say that he had been standing for the last hour watching the struggle toward consciousness, or that he had sent a message downstairs asking for the doctor to be fetched. His action and fright were perhaps justified, for he had entered the room to discover a ghastly spectacle. Wade's tossing and turning during the midnight contest with his demon of despair must have disturbed the wound, and after he had fallen asleep it had begun to bleed through the bandage, spreading over the bed-clothes and smearing his hair and face.

The result was symbolical of the adventure through which his spirit had travailed during the night: a tragic figure, pallid, and repulsively mauled, still clinging by mere instinct to a life that obviously could never be worth much again, so horrible was the mutilation.

It was not necessary for Wilson to appreciate the deeper significance of the scene. He was sufficiently deceived by appearances. Even though

Wade was only semi-conscious he could sense the fear in the man's face. Looking down, he saw the cause, but without being alarmed himself. He was, indeed, so detached that the melodramatic touch amused him. Whatever was happening, it could not be natural.

'My God!' he managed to say, his voice weak and far-away, 'what ever is all this bloody mess? What's happened, Wilson? I'm as weak as a rat. I can't sit up or——'

'You lie still, sir, and don't try to talk! One way and another, you're in a very low state. It strikes me——'

'Don't talk nonsense, man!' Wade tried to invigorate himself by a burst of temper. He was also ashamed of the condition of the bedclothes, and wanted to put things right before other inmates of the house came on the scene. 'Here, be good enough to help me out of this. I can't behave in this fashion immediately after arriving at the house. What will the chief think of me? Damn silly business, the whole of——'

'Look here, sir, this is serious, I tell you! You'll do nothing until the doctor comes. I can see you've been run down for some time past; and now this accident—it may be trivial to you, but you cut the artery—and you ought to know it. That's why it broke out again during the night. If you ask me, you're lucky you didn't bleed to death!'

Wilson glared at him so severely that he sank back, and tried to smile.

'All right, sergeant, don't bully me. But we must do something to make this room look less like a front-line dressing-station.'

'We 'll do nothing, sir, that means your moving.'

'Oh, well, be damned to you.'

He really was too weak to feel much sense of shame. He closed his eyes, and opened them a few moments later to find that Wilson had gone.

The house was silent. He presumed he was in a room at the back, overlooking the garden, for branches waved across the window panes, making mesmeric passes with leaf-shadows up and down the net curtains. And shadows of these shadows swam around the ceiling and walls, like deep-sea creatures, silent and obscure, intent upon the magic of their own slow rhythm. The movement lulled him like music, and the background of baroque furniture and mouldings was unimportant. The only actuality was this pavane in a world of half-life, a world of sleep and bloodless dreaming where nothing mattered; no shame, no burden, no tyranny of the past, no intolerant emotions to tease the soul out of a man until from sheer weariness he . . .

But a figure emerged between him and the light. He dragged his life up into his eyes, opened them, and saw Josephine Gould standing in a dressing-gown, her hair veiled in a boudoir-cap. One fist was clasped at her bosom, holding the edges of the gown together.

'What is it?' he murmured. Formalities were

impossible with this woman whom he had first met less than twenty-four hours ago. She seemed to expect none, for as he spoke she put out her hand and touched the bloodstained bed. The folds of the dressing-gown fell apart, revealing a low-cut nightdress and the upper half of her breasts.

'So this is my doing?' She spoke in a low voice, touched with hoarseness and languor, half stupefied with surprise. Wade suspected something else; he sensed, by insight acquired only with this temporary debility, that she gloated over the spectacle. Once again he caught the illusion of a panther crouching over its prey; himself the prey. The black gown, the steady rise and fall of the bosom, the animal intensity of her eyes as she stared at the bloodstains—these helped the illusion. But he no longer fought to push it from him. He closed his eyes again, and felt her bending over him, her fingers groping at his wrist. His pulse responded to her touch, and he was glad to lie there under the contact. He felt the skin glowing, and a warmth crept up his arm.

'Yes,' he said, after the spell had worked in silence for an immense number of pulse-beats. 'You must be proud of your handiwork.'

At this implied confession of her superior strength Josephine laughed—a deep chuckle of pleasure that again added to the magnetic, feline attraction between them. He opened his eyes, and looked into hers.

'I'm not sorry,' she said. 'Do you understand? I'm not sorry. It has cut away more than a spot

or two of your blood, hasn't it? How can we be polite now—with this between us? It's like a kind of—of ceremony.'

'Nuptials?' he asked, rousing himself to taunt her. But she leaned lower over him, shutting her eyes and moistening her lips with her tongue. Then he felt them upon his, moist and hot—and they moved to whisper to him, each word shaping an immature caress, lip to lip.

'You're cold—your lips are cold. *You* are, too! Cold-hearted and dead; you fool, you angry fool. You hate everything, don't you?—you think you are cheated. And yet you've blood in your body, and a power to set people talking and thinking and liking—do you hear? Liking! And wondering about you!'

'Go away!' he said, determined to insult her, furious with her cheap gifts. 'I've overheard all that before. It's only the price of a pair of earrings!'

She laughed again, still holding him by the wrist.

'What if it is? You moralist! That's your trouble, isn't it? You want to eat your cake and have it too. You daren't take what's offered; it may not be covered by the insurance policy!'

'One of us is mad,' he managed to say, jerking his wrist free. He was now both angry and frightened; and so weak that he felt tears in his eyes, and a constriction at his throat. 'What does it all mean? An absolute stranger—and you already tied up like this to an excellent fellow.'

'Poor little English gentleman! Can't you try and forget that—let it out with the superfluous blood? Mr. Mad Quixote of a secretary, too faithful and too pure, what good have your virtue and chastity done to anybody? Oh, be honest about that!'

He looked at her now with a touch of amusement, for her questions had become pleading, and this weakened her position, fettering the animal with human misgivings.

'I'll answer that in a few weeks' time when I know you better. You may think less of my virtue by that time. But seriously, Mrs. Gould—what am I to do? You ought to realize that I'm in a nice mess.'

'Yes; Wilson told me, that's why I came in; to clear up what I had begun.'

'Confound it, I don't mean that,' he said, lifting a corner of the sheet, and staring at it in disgust. 'What will your father say, burdened with a sick stranger in his house, and all his papers——'

'I know father better than you do,' she said. She was now human; the animal intensity gone. 'He'll only be concerned about complications; for he is a clinical maniac. That's the truth about him, poor dear. I get my greediness from him—but I'm germ-proof. That's the difference!' She laughed again. 'Oh, no, he's not soft—but his ideas of work, of generosity—oh, well, of everything—are magnified, distorted by his millions. He'll pamper you one day, and destroy you the

next. But now he is getting old, and he thinks people are more brittle. And also he is frightened and daren't touch a thing in the markets; which means that he has nothing to do except to watch, and wait! Perhaps that is why he took Miriam's hint last night. Otherwise he wouldn't tolerate Farthing near him—any more than I would. Could you?'

While talking, she had been stripping the sheets; and now she put her arm under him, lifted him, and removed his pyjama coat. He shivered, and his teeth chattered as he replied:

'I've only seen him for about five minutes. He's a cool customer——'

'Here, you must put this round you while I find another coat and sheets.'

She slipped off her gown, put it gently round him, and clad only in her nightdress, walked across to a chest of drawers beside the window. The light shone through her single garment, revealing the full limbs and hips as she stood with her back to him. By now he was incapable of surprise. This woman obviously was an Olympian and no mortal. Perhaps her wealth had made the difference, substituting some auriferous ichor for blood—but no, that was absurd, to imagine this woman without blood! Wade laughed wantonly to himself. Everything that blood represented, the whole mystery and sub-religion built upon the legend and experience of the properties of that terrible fluid, might be summed up in this splendid creature.

Shameless, non-moral, fierce and tender, and no doubt completely treacherous where her passions were concerned, there she stood, quite regardless of the fact that she was practically naked, and performing these embarrassing physical services for a strange man who had never even hinted that he was interested in her.

Wade realized that it was some years since he had been so closely in contact with a woman. A year had passed since his divorce, and for three years before that he had severed himself from any relationship with his wife. Pique, jealousy, rage, despair, the whole increasing gamut of disillusion, had acted like drugs upon his blood, reducing it to a servile sluggishness active enough to keep him alive, but no more; a life that never rose to adventure, or belief, or emotion.

He could do nothing now. He was weak, ill perhaps, and only sufficiently tied to life to feel a faint warmth of interest in this situation—yes, the situation and not the woman. She, so far, was merely a figure in the bitter comedy of aftermath, the posthumous existence which could continue until doomsday for all he cared.

‘Do you know, we left my penknife there?’ he said, as she returned to the bedside with a clean pyjama coat. She laughed.

‘I reckon that’s rusting by now.’

## CHAPTER XIV

## A SHARP-EDGED GIFT

WADE was kept in bed. At first he rebelled, partly from a sense of duty towards his employer, partly from the suspicion that the doctor was trading upon the trivial accident. The unwilling invalid tried to show his disapproval of the whole business by asking to see Mr. Fletcher. Some days passed before the old gentleman came in reluctantly, and sat on the edge of a chair, at a safe distance from the bed. He looked at the patient over his spectacles, frowning and twitching his lips.

'My dear fellow!' he began, cutting short Wade's protestations against this fantastic imprisonment. 'My dear fellow! It is very unfortunate. *Very!* Josephine should be—but no, that is impossible. I have tried to make her see the consequences of her wilful carelessness. But, no use! No use! The doctor assures me that we must take care. You apparently were run-down. How was that?'

He did not expect Wade to answer the anxious running catechism. He rambled on, shrewd but abstracted, for nearly half an hour, wringing his hands as he talked, peering about the room, periodically stopping his discourse to stare at some suspected nesting-place of dust and infection. He lamented Josephine's personality, terrifying and

unintelligible to him! He regretted that Wade should thus be thrown out of action after only one day's work; he assured him, dubiously, that it would make no difference to their future relationship, and that Miriam was arranging for young Farthing to come in each day until Wade was able to take up his normal duties.

Miriam was mentioned with an air of thanksgiving. Wade could see that the old man trusted her completely, both in practical matters, and in the more difficult mental and emotional affairs, those depths where he refused to venture.

The listener heard and observed in silence after he had made his protest. He saw that the odds were against him. The doctor had been, examined and re-dressed the wound, prescribed a tonic, and ordered complete rest. Wade's effort in that quarter was immediately crushed by a heavy professional barrage. Wilson had taken up a disciplinary attitude. Now Mr. Fletcher completely ignored the problem. He listened, perhaps, cocking his head on one side like a scrawny old eagle, but resuming his monologue without commenting on Wade's attempt to assert himself as a man of action.

It was not until after lunch that he was left alone long enough to attempt to break through this conspiracy of the household to keep him in bed. Wilson served the meal, and in spite of a slight nausea Wade managed to eat some boiled fish. A glass of burgundy gave him a false assurance,

and immediately the room was clear he crept out of bed and walked over to the dressing-table.

The apparition in the glass was startling enough. The face that confronted him was leaden, with eyes dilated and thereby unrecognizable either in colour or character. The lips stretched bloodless and indrawn, and the cheek-bones and nose-bridge shone through the skin. He stared; and the ascetic apparition stared back. Could this be the result of a mere childish accident? Or was that midnight journey of the spirit responsible for such devastation of the flesh? He shuddered, tried to turn away, but could not. That countenance held him, and he stared into the depths of its misery, unable to think or feel anything but an incredulous wonder. He could identify nothing; here was nothing familiar, no recognition of experiences, evil or good; not even an understandable fatigue or cynicism; nothing but a deep-flung misery, blank, neither hoping or hopeless.

Appalled by this dreadful impersonality, he knelt there, still staring as a preliminary to thought that would not begin to function; waiting to recommence this exhausting inquiry into the problems of the past, their tangibility now, and their metamorphoses in the future, if there should be any future. The hypnosis of this futile waiting gradually crept over him, and at last, with arms folded on the dressing-table, his head sank down. There he remained, kneeling inanimate, his face buried in his arms, still unable to commence the process of thought,

still indifferent to this cessation of self, of identity. He was as still and lifeless as a stone.

It was thus that Miriam Fletcher discovered him. She entered the room quietly, hoping that he would be asleep. Having been out since early morning, she had only just learned how grave was the view taken of Wade's illness, and she at once came to satisfy herself. What she found was not reassuring. It was so unexpected that she made a quick exclamation of surprise; but by the time Wade looked up she had concealed her alarm, and he saw, or half saw through dazed eyes, a countenance serene and patient.

'Well, Mr. Wade,' she said, smiling as she approached the bed to begin straightening it, 'you 'll be feeling cold, won't you?'

The voice had the same rich glints and languors as Mrs. Gould's; but her tone and her presence brought a new quality into the room. Wade's mind began to function again, emerging from its trance to create an image of a weather-vane swinging round before a change of wind. He shivered; but it was the shiver of a man awaking.

'Come along! You must get back into bed. Let me help.'

To his dismay he found that he needed her support. The virtue of the wine had left him, and he now had to admit that all this pother about his health was justified. The discovery was humiliating, and he staggered back to bed, trying not to lean on Miss Fletcher's thin arm.

'I'm awfully sorry,' he said, when at last he was back, with a couple of pillows and a bolster to support him.

'What about?' she asked.

'Altogether. Principally, I think, that the knife didn't cut a bit deeper and finish the job off properly.'

She did not reply to this, but seated herself at the bottom of the bed, and contemplated her foot as she swung it slowly. Wade watched her. She looked younger without a hat. She was one of those women whose hair is a crowning glory, giving a touch of extravagance to an otherwise demure and precise personal presence.

'That may not have been necessary,' she said at last. 'The gods may have been convinced that you died long ago.' With this she suddenly looked straight into his eyes, and he saw anger and reproach.

'You're very quick at divining the truth, aren't you?'

'So it *is* the truth?' she returned. 'You do acknowledge that you have already committed suicide?'

He did not reply, and she continued: 'Yes—for causes that everybody shares. You forget that! We could all do it if we let ourselves knuckle under! Personally, Mr. Wade, I don't believe in your way of escape. It doesn't work! You don't escape. I know that, you see, and I can tell you that you are a fool and a coward; and why in

God's name do you come to people like this, with your pathos, and your charming gentleness?'

She had not raised her voice, but it was suddenly charged with the same ferocity, just as unexpected, as she had shown during her attack on Hilaire de Vaudrac. It was a kind of visitation that lifted her up, the rage hovering as an ecstasy, slightly removed from her and in no way clouding her gentleness and serenity. The effect was no less startling now that Wade experienced this strange transformation for the second time. His jaw dropped, and quite simply and childishly he was afraid. He could understand now why she was treated with a respect bordering on timidity.

'What do you mean?' He tried bravado, but his words lacked conviction. They needed none, however, for the storm was over.

'What *do* I mean?' she echoed, and leaning forward she touched the back of his hand with her long fingers. 'Only that possibly you have opened a new chapter, and that you are not yet too old or blind to read.'

'Maybe,' he said, dully. He was tired again, and wanted no talk of nostrums. He could not conquer his fear of her. She moved him to a sense of novelty, and he could not respond to that invitation toward fresh hope, fresh interests, and continued adventure.

They sat for some time in silence, and he was perfectly content; even enjoyed such communicative non-communication. When she spoke again, he was

pleased to hear about her morning's activities. She had been with Antoinette to see Hilaire to discuss two projects: the setting up of her shop, and the more vague proposal to turn Antoinette's cottage into a holiday hotel. She was already negotiating the lease of premises in the Boulevard des Italiens, likely to be attractive to her rich fellow-countrywomen and to English and German seekers of the latest mode from Paris.

'I'm rather a monomaniac about clothes,' she said, smiling at him.

'I've noticed that.'

'You like my ideas?'

'I do.' For the first time he smiled at her; a frail ghost of happiness.

'I'm glad of that.'

'Why?'

'Because I know that you are in the same trade.'

'How would you generalize that?'

'Supplying the world with good taste. Teaching it what suits it. You do it with bricks and mortar and furniture. I do it with more flimsy materials.'

'Well, I hope you'll persuade the world more thoroughly than I did.'

'You haven't finished yet, Mr. Wade. You've been a sick man, perhaps. Maybe for a long time. I don't know; but I guess you don't either.'

They lapsed into silence again, and she groped in her handbag, took out a small packet and handed it to him.

‘Look, I bought you this while I was out this morning.’

He took it without thanking her, and opened it, to find a silver-handled penknife, with his initials engraved on one side, and ‘St. Cloud’ on the other. He looked at it, turning it over and over and examining the engravings.

‘That’s very nice of you,’ he said shyly. ‘How did you know that——’

‘I remembered while we were driving home. I suppose we were all so agitated that none of us thought to pick up the knife. Was that one a gift also?’

‘Yes.’ Then he added bitterly: ‘Knives are said to be unlucky, aren’t they? I must pay you a ha’penny for this.’

They both laughed, and she walked over to the dressing-table and took a coin from the tumbled contents of his trouser pockets. ‘Two sous,’ she said, holding it up, and they were both laughing as Wilson came into the room. He made a little mouth and coughed.

‘Miss de Vaudrac,’ he said, giving her an English title. ‘She has called to see you.’

Wade was suddenly aware of his face throbbing as the blood mounted to his cheeks. What was the matter? Why had this young woman come? How could she be interested? Miss Fletcher was watching him, her wide-set eyes calm and trustful. Good Lord, what was he stumbling into? Another fool’s paradise?

No; he would not be trapped so easily by derisive

fate. He did not appreciate the initial stages of that cat-and-mouse game.

'Tell her I'm asleep,' he said.

Miss Fletcher opened her lips, but her words were arrested by a discreet smile, and silently she followed Wilson out of the room.

Lying alone, idly contemplating the penknife in his hand, he wondered why he had refused to see Mademoiselle de Vaudrac. She was astonishingly beautiful, with those expressive eyes, and that quaint air of matter-of-factness. Very restful. Besides, she was the sister, the counterpart, of young Charles de Vaudrac, a being who had attracted him curiously, from that moment in the restaurant in Boulogne when courtesies were exchanged, and a silent but proud appeal had flashed across those brown eyes.

## CHAPTER XV

### REPAYMENT OF A DEBT

AFTER the first week Wade was convalescent. The wound was healing, and the fever had left him. He tried again to rebel, and his effort resulted in a compromise. Farthing was to bring up the correspondence each morning, so that they could work upon it together. The doctor, backed up by a colleague whom Mr. Fletcher had insisted upon

consulting, refused any further concession, and Wade had to be content.

To his surprise he found that Farthing could be very capable. The man had an ingenious mind, and when he cared to apply himself he could tackle many things: perhaps too many. That was his trouble. He carried on normally with a job for a short time, and then began to discover all sorts of dramatic possibilities in it, which he wanted to exploit. If he could not, he became bored and fretful, turning from the work with lamentations about his own feebleness and futility. This was always a prelude to some mischievous outbreak that would ruin all he had done while his good angel ruled him.

For the first few days that the two men worked together, Wade was not strong enough to attack Farthing's wayward moods. He listened to the juvenile boastings, and said nothing. He made no comment when lighted cigarettes were laid on the bedcover, or chair, or on a book, while Farthing gesticulated over some meteoric idea that shot across his mind. Wade decided that he must adopt the technique of an adult toward a child; quietness, judicious acquiescence, suggestion, and other wiles to keep control and to protect himself from the crude vitality of the undisciplined animal. He was rewarded with the same occasional moments of pleasure that one gets from a child: certain confidences, and naïve solicitude over one's more apparent discomforts.

Farthing was muscular in spite of his laziness, and he had the athlete's bewildered sympathy for the sick man. For some few days he ministered very charmingly, and was shrewd enough also to see that Wade's illness was more than physical. He tried to keep himself quiet, and to do nothing to exasperate the other's nerves. After the letters and papers were dealt with, he even offered to read to Wade. He began with a volume of essays by the Abbé Brémond, but meeting difficulties that required concentration, he began to find fault with the author. At the third attempt his reading was interrupted by sighings, and nail-bitings, and muttered exclamations. Finally he managed to break off, slip the book under the bed, and beguile Wade to an interest in a motoring journal which he had brought up that morning.

Wade was amused, and did not complain. After all, it was very generous of this restless and wayward creature to stay in the room at all. He was obviously making an effort to be useful and agreeable. Wade wondered why. He did not discover that Farthing lived in a desperate state of self-distrust and loneliness, with constant efforts to win people's confidence and affection. He was too much concerned with his own shortcomings to notice those of another and younger man. And he was not in a mood to detect altruism; even in such patent services as Farthing now offered.

The relationship always became more difficult when a third person appeared. Even the presence

of Wilson created an audience for whom Farthing had to exert himself at everybody else's expense. Wilson, who by now was devoted to Wade, resented these posturings by a fellow whom he could not place. He looked upon Farthing as a denationalized freak, and his wry mouth and glassy eye showed his disapproval. But he remained passive, setting no spark to the heavily-charged air. Farthing ordered him about, swanked like an undergraduate, even showed nasty flashes of temper; but Wilson maintained his restraint.

Then the inevitable happened. Charles and Antoinette de Vaudrac called to see Wade. Farthing was in the room, and he remained there. Wade sensed the struggle, noticing the agony of indecision on Farthing's face; the conflict of the two selves, and the triumph of the lesser. It was not a pretty spectacle. The man's very limbs seemed to become possessed of this demon of distrust. He talked loudly, laughed at his own facetiousness, said patronizing things to Charles, was over-friendly to Wade (just to show the others), and ignored Antoinette. He flung himself into the arm-chair and let her seat herself on a small stool. Charles remained standing until Wilson appeared with another chair. Those in the room were loaded with books and papers.

Wade chafed. He was sufficiently embarrassed without this additional discomfort. After some ten minutes during which neither he nor his guests had been able to exchange more than formal

civilities, he curtly asked Farthing to go downstairs and inquire if Mr. Fletcher had any more work for immediate attention. It was the first time that he had been authoritative or even decisive, and Farthing was pulled up with a jerk. His great underlip dropped and hung out, his eyes glared, cold and watery.

Everybody was distressed, and Wade felt ashamed as well as angry. He, too, wanted to make a favourable impression, and this young fool was ruining it. The brother and sister, their good manners accentuated by this scene, would think him a sort of army bully. A beastly situation. His dismay was apparent, and he need not have feared their censure.

Antoinette saw only a pale, thin face, bony forehead, and anxious eyes clouded with a remote and very obscure sullenness totally belying their natural light and honesty. She noticed the thin hair, that had the appearance of being wind-ruffled, with a wisp across one temple. She saw the white-nailed fingers plucking at the quilt. And her heart was moved to compassion.

'Ah! So you are working already, Mr. Wade? Why is that? You should not let him, Lincoln. He's——'

'Let him! My dear girl, you're talking nonsense! If you——'

'Come, Farthing.' Wade was losing his temper now. 'You're forgetting yourself, aren't you?'

It was a foolish thing to say, and had he known his man better he might have avoided such a

mistake. The result was disproportionate. Farthing turned white, bit the corner of his handkerchief which had been twisted round his fist, and broke into a loud and angry guffaw. Charles, with an exclamation of distress, put his hands to his ears, exclaiming: 'Must you bray indoors, Farthing?'

Antoinette rose, took Farthing by the arm, and shook him.

'Lincoln,' she said, 'you are in a wicked mood. Why will you allow yourself——'

'To forget myself,' he sneered, imitating Wade's voice, 'Yes, why do I forget myself? Perhaps it is because every prig in the universe thinks I can be treated like a schoolboy.'

'Stop now! You are talking nonsense!'

She was angry, too, and her little figure, straight as an arrow, confronted the recumbent Farthing, whose arms were flung over the sides of the chair, so that his hands lay on the floor like two discarded boxing-gloves. Antoinette's large eyes did not disguise their contempt as they saw this slack and exaggeratedly insolent posture.

'In any case,' she said quietly, 'this is not the way to behave in a sick room. You are certainly forgetting yourself.'

Farthing could no longer control his perverse temper. It contorted his face, emphasizing the unpleasant formation of his mouth, and suffusing his eyes until they leered, sultry and bloodshot. He breathed noisily, and his nostrils were white and distended.

'Oh, well, I suppose I must apologize for forgetting myself,' he shouted. 'Everybody is being so damned polite. But there's one thing I haven't forgotten, Toni, my darling, my love! And that is the five hundred francs you lent me recently, on that—that *complaisant* occasion!'

With a fumbling hand he snatched out his pocket-book, counted the notes, and held them at arm's length. A second later they were flying above his head. Charles had suddenly projected himself from the other side of the room, knocked up Farthing's arm, and now faced him, a miniature embodiment of Gallic rage. Before he could speak or act further, his sister interposed.

'Thank you, Lincoln,' she said quietly, so quietly that Wade looked keenly at her, his interest overcoming his distress, 'I was only too glad to help you. I did it for your father's sake; not through *complaisance*.'

'Yes! My father! My father!' suddenly cried Farthing, throwing back his head and flinging up his arms in an absurd theatrical gesture. 'O good God! that's funny! My father!' And he ran, laughing and weeping, from the room, stumbling first into the door, groping along the adjoining wall-space for the handle, thus suitably concluding an orgy of self-consciousness by a piece of play-acting.

His flight was so unexpected that the others could do nothing. Charles recovered first, and was about to run out after Farthing, but Antoinette slipped in front of him and shut the door.

'Come, stupid,' she said, 'and help me to pick them up.' Before he could move, however, she had gathered them all, and now stood like a little market-woman, counting them.

'Did you hear what he said, Antoinette? *Complaisant!* What did he mean by that?'

But she did not answer. She was re-counting the notes, and refused to look up.

'What does he ever mean?' Wade spoke for the first time. His alarm had subsided, giving place to amusement at the spectacle of the brother hovering between rage and perplexity; the sister covering her possible confusion with a pretence of mercenariness. He laughed with relief. Very clever of her; and such a simple ruse. What lay behind it all? He was really quite enjoying himself over this little comedy of hypocrisy, which so obviously concealed one of those minor intrigues that would illustrate his philosophy of life. Of course, that handsome, six-foot fellow, that twentieth-century Narcissus, half-crazy with sheer spinelessness, would attract women. They would mother him, and lend him money; yes, and be *complaisant* even. What a contemptible hound, though! To kiss and tell—and be paid for it!

He looked with sympathy at the brother, and found his gaze returned. Charles was watching him, appealing to him again for help; perhaps unconsciously. Quite pathetic, those nervous fingers drumming on his lips; his eyes fixed in some concentration of effort to solve the riddle of that dis-

gusting word dropped by a fool, or even perhaps a blackguard. Poor little lady: she had been nicely gulled. But there she was, re-counting her money; concerned only with that, and indifferent to the slight put upon her reputation—no small matter in an old French house and probably a Catholic house. No wonder the brother—but he must say something to cover up the whole wretched incident. That appeal must be answered.

‘Good heavens!’ Wade continued, his cynicism hidden away. ‘What a barnyard existence we should all lead if we took that poor fellow seriously! He’s as touchy as a game-cock. Does he ever mean anything? I should imagine that——’

‘You are right, Mr. Wade,’ said Antoinette, putting the money into her bag. ‘I did not expect to be repaid so quickly, if at all; but his father is the dearest old man, and worships him. And if he went home now to confess that once more, for the twentieth time, he had lost his job and wanted money, the consequences might be terrible—terrible!’

‘You see,’ Charles took up the narrative; both spoke rapidly, eager to co-operate with Wade in the burying of the ugly embarrassment, ‘old Julius Farthing has recently had a stroke. He has never ceased working since he was a boy; and over forty years of incessant creative energy is enough for three men!’ Then with a comic grimace he added: ‘And he had this family life. It is unique! Madam! You should see madam! She has ruled

the home like a Prussian drill-sergeant. You have seen the result! And everybody pities this son of hers—the most exasperating specimen of humanity that was ever born of woman—if *she* can be called a woman. I picture her conceiving him! Ah! Toni, imagine that! With instruction book in hand, numbering the—but I become indecent! Yet it is certain that she whipped him in the womb—but I am talking too much, I am tiring you, Mr. Wade. And we came to say how distressed we were to hear——’

‘You are very charming people, monsieur. I appreciate it. I know that your sister saved my life that day; and if my life had been worth saving I could not have been more grateful than I am now——’

He stopped. Antoinette was looking at him; and suddenly all this pose and deep-seated wilfulness of spirit seemed slightly ridiculous; or, at least, his effort to express it seemed to be so. The poison inside, the rancour of time, were real and solid enough—no woman’s gaze could affect those. But this dabbling with cynicism—one could play that game with the intellectuals, the poseurs: for what it was worth.

Why was she looking at him with that devastating simplicity; not like a child, who is curious and uncomprehending? Clearly those extraordinary eyes signified intuition before which no effort at mental or emotional obliquity could succeed.

No; here was no occasion to use one’s ingenuity.

He dared to look again, to try and reassure himself by reminding his senses of the concessions which she had recently made to that fellow Farthing. But this effort also failed. One would not go to Antoinette for mere physical delights. That quaint, old-fashioned face, with small chin; the decisive nose, a family rather than a personal asset; and the petite figure, beautifully proportioned, especially about the bust and arms: these were not for careless enjoyment. One would need to want the whole personality; body, soul, and mind; or nothing at all.

He was increasingly conscious of her eyes, and he became uncomfortable. What did she want? Why had she come here to confound him and upset his precariously balanced cup of bitterness?

'I don't think that I *have* saved your life, Mr. Wade,' she said; and he was left wondering if her words held more than their apparent meaning.

Charles was again talkative. He perched himself on the edge of the bed, an ash-tray in one hand, using it for its normal purpose, and also as a baton to conduct the orchestra of his ideas. He directed himself at Wade, but included his sister, who sat on the stool below him, her head appearing above the side of the bed. Periodically Charles paused to lean down and offer her the ash-tray, without interrupting his narrative about the recovery of the derelict Renault car, and his proposal to drive it down to Moret-les-Sablons, to discuss on the site, his sister's project of opening an hotel.

'Perhaps you will come with us, monsieur?' he

asked, smiling at Wade so persuasively that the latter had to agree, though vaguely, knowing that he could not leave his post so soon after this bad beginning.

'You see, we intend to rebuild the cottage, and add enormously to it. I shall do the internal decorations myself—with *her* help,' and he placed a hand on his sister's black hair.

'Yes,' she said, 'if Hilaire can raise enough money to lend us. He is always on the point of bankruptcy, you understand, Mr. Wade?' And she laughed happily, reaching up a plump little hand and capturing her brother by the wrist.

Wade lay back on his pillows wondering why he did not tell them that he was an architect, and had made a small fortune in just that kind of work. Something forbade him: fear, painful memory; or was it a touch of sheer insanity? He was able to suggest that possibility now, after these nights and days of hellish peace, body at rest, mind drifting in helpless conjecture following the train of that first night of horrors.

It was not worth while. He was tired, and explanation needed energy. He had none. Perhaps later on, when they got going, he would give a few hints that might be useful. But he could not be dragged back into some big task that would link him up again with all his former life. He lay contemplating that vanished world, and became aware of silence.

De Vaudrac had ceased. He had seen a bleak,

vacant look creep over Wade's face, clouding his eyes, adding perhaps even more interest to a face already attractive by its air of aloofness. But that relaxation or withdrawal of the man's personality, the dimming of the spirit's illuminations in the window of the eye, might mean simple boredom. Was it so? And the anxiety filled de Vaudrac's countenance with that wistful appeal, that hovering, hesitant tentativeness, which first had so singularly drawn Wade's interest. It acted in the same way now, and he was almost remorseful, half aware of having chilled the eagerness of his young friend. Yes, he even called him that! Was he creeping back to the possibility of human relationships? Well, remote ones, perhaps, that threatened not even a spider-thread bond. He smiled, as though to reassure the other.

Antoinette rose, and said softly: 'You are tired, Mr. Wade. We will go now. But I hope you will come to our cottage. It is so restful there; and you need rest, I think.'

'I shall be delighted,' he murmured, half sincerely with no intention of following up his momentary inclination to accept. Then he looked into her eyes again, and was ashamed.

## CHAPTER XVI

## A SOUL IS DESTROYED

FOR the rest of that day Farthing sat about in the cafés struggling against the violence of his passions. Tempests of hatred shook him, and again and again he trembled with fear as he saw his reason drowned in these waves whose origin he could not explain. For in the moments when his thoughts were coherent he recognized that facts had little to do with his state of mind. People had really treated him quite well, and it was only his petty vanity that made him behave like a spoilt child in Wade's bedroom.

He told himself that he was penitent for this; but half subconsciously he gazed into deeper gulfs of self, and what he saw there was so vague, so terrifying, that the superficial remorse was swept away before further wild bursts of anger, only the more fierce because they could fasten on no object to explain their origin.

There was only one certainty in this welter of emotion. He must not go to Miriam or Antoinette for help. He refused to examine this resolution. It was too dangerous, too humiliating. It cut right down into the secrets of his character, bringing to light such ugly truths that suicide or madness would be the only way to escape from them. He glanced at the idea that he had failed both these women;

failed in such a way that they no longer looked upon him as a man. His rage again overpowered him as he recognized the change in them. They both were gentle; willing to help him; to give him money; no doubt to put up with all his foolish tricks of conduct and his irresponsibility toward the world. They now expected nothing else from him. They treated him as defective in some way: and he knew that it was physical; because the change in both of them had followed—but he dared not face that fact.

The blood rushed to his head and he stood up, clenched his fists, and shook them at the awning above him. Then, collapsing into his chair, he knocked over the glass globe in which the waiters kept their *serviettes*. It clattered on the pavement, its stand hitting him across the shin. But he took no notice. His head was buried in his arms, and he was sobbing, so violently that the table trembled under him. Neighbours, sipping their after-dinner coffee, looked round, making inaudible comments of sympathy or of disgust. Finally, a waiter came along, his eyes veiled with discretion, and picked up the stand. He then stood over the bowed figure, touched it on the shoulder, and stooped to whisper: 'Monsieur, monsieur; can I fetch you anything? Some black coffee? Very strong? Be tranquil, monsieur. We all have our troubles. And a cognac, monsieur?'

With his hand over his eyes, Farthing fumbled in his pocket, paid the waiter, and slouched away,

averting his head from the half-polite curiosity which he had aroused. He was a pitiable creature as he made his way toward his lodging. With hat pulled over his eyes, and collar turned up, he stumbled forward, bent body following the head which hung down almost to his waist. One *agent* after another turned to look at him, suspecting a drunkard or a drug-addict, but none of them spoke to him. He entered his room and lay on the bed through a night of self-scourging. For now the rage had subsided, leaving him weak and overborne by a sense of loneliness too terrible to bear.

Next morning he got up late, dressed without shaving, took some coffee in a restaurant, and made his way to the Gare de Lyon. His fear of his mother was overcome by a stronger feeling; he must see his father. That was the only stable thing in his world; and sooner or later he must always return to it. The father who was so dumb, so pathetic; the father who loved him and whose industry and genius thwarted him at every turn. He had to go back, to confess defeat again; to face that heart-searing look of reproach, to stir up once more the old struggle between that sacrificial generosity and the mother's rigid disapproval.

As he sat in the train he looked out over the autumn fields and woods. Everything was ripe. Gourds and melons shone like gold in the peasants' gardens. The stubble patches caught the sun, and the little round ricks glowed with an inward light. But none of this harvest was his. He was

destined never to reap, because he was incapable of sowing. The double significance of that idea crippled his mind. He shut his eyes, and images of shame hovered before him: Miriam, Antoinette, kind and motherly, but both extricating themselves from his touch, withdrawing into a hardness and disdain that they could not disguise. Why was it? Why could he not be as other men?

But there was no answer.

At Montigny-sur-Loing he left the train and wandered down to the river. Now that he was so near home his heart failed him. He would rest a little, and have a meal, for he had not eaten for nearly twenty-four hours. The town and riverside were deserted, lost in the mid-week sleep. The only sound that his ear recognized was the roar of the weir and the mill. It was a deep pulse, dropping and ascending by half-tones through some rhythmic pattern that sometimes divided into two, water-voice against wheel-voice, for moments of harmony, only to reunite into the dominant throb, throb that set the pace, the character, the temperament of the whole neighbourhood of man and nature.

Farthing had been born under the domination of that rhythm. It had perhaps influenced his personality, pounding with such insistence upon his subconscious spirit that the seedling of manhood had begun to grow athwart, uncertain which was the true pulse of nature, wheel-pulse or water-pulse.

Without volition, he walked down to the weir,

stood watching it for a quarter of an hour, and then entered the restaurant garden near by. He sat at a table under a willow tree by the edge of the water, eating his meal and throwing crumbs of bread to the ducks paddling among the weeds and rushes in this peaceful little back-drift where the willow-fingers dipped to touch their own reflections.

Water, backs of leaves, the wine in his glass, the distant trees and stretches of bulrush, all caught and combed the sunshine into an infinite change of gesture and grace. Glitter, sparkle, and velvet-softness, every metamorphosis of light, played before his eyes. But he saw nothing of these familiar things; not even when a kingfisher flew across, tying a rein of blue fire between two willow trees.

This man, who had postured in Paris as an artist amongst the artists, took no pleasure and no pain from these riches of light, the natural food to nourish a painter's mind. Now, tortured with suspicions of his shortcomings, he was denied an escape through other interests. He who had proposed to criticize the art of Charles de Vaudrac, that happy innocent, could not look up from his own self-mirrored image to grasp one instant of external beauty.

Carrying his heavy doom about him like a cloak, he left the restaurant, and walked over the bridge and along the road to La Genevraie. The road passed through low ground, and wide stretches of grass on each side were waist-deep in ragwort,

that smelled like crushed apples. Robins twittered in the willow bushes, and flicked the grey leaves with their wings. An adder, seeking a winter bed, slid across the road, but Farthing shuffled along and did not even pause to glance at it.

Rising to the bridge over the canal, he stopped and looked along the water. It was motionless, reflecting an unbroken image of the poplar trees that backed the towpaths. Trees, image, and water diminished with distance, closing into each other to reach a vanishing point. Not a sound; only the rustle of his coat against the parapet as he breathed. Here was a picture which he had known since childhood; something changeless, intimate. But he stood there without seeing. He was going home again. He had done that many times before, to confess failure. But he had never before lost confidence, or the ability to laugh away all reproach and criticism. He had never before known this sense of fear, of being isolated, marked out.

Standing there, sullen, with unseeing eyes, he was awakened by the winding of a horn in the distance behind him. It was a melancholy cry, carrying across centuries of time, like an echo from the horn of Childe Roland. He crossed to the other parapet, and watched the place where canal, paths, river banks, and poplars curved round, the water-gleam closing upon a scimitar-point. Later—perhaps further centuries had passed meanwhile—the horn sounded again. It was followed by a low and lazy chugging, and then, like a snail from its shell, a long, black

barge emerged round the bend, a little moustache of light prinking before its bows. The quiet, the mirrored world, crumpled away before it. The moustache preluded ripples, and they became wavelets that tossed and tumbled to right and left, making the rushes rattle like sword-blades.

The whole barge was now visible, swinging slowly round the bend. The penthouse over the stern was gaily painted, and pots and boxes of flowers stood within the polished brass rail. A baby, tethered by a rope round its waist, sat on the roof, and near it a mongrel lay asleep.

The barge approached, glided under the bridge, and passed on, breaking the mirror-world, so that the whole scene changed. A man stood at the helm, smoking a pipe. He was dark, with small, bright eyes. He did not even glance at the figure on the bridge. At the top of the hatchway a woman stood at her washtub, her arms bare to the shoulder. A green spotted handkerchief was tied over her hair. She looked up shyly, once only, as the barge passed below. These were natives of another world, half gypsy, half maritime, and they had no dealings with the peasants, except to call at the canal-side inns for food and wine, oil for their engines, or fodder for their horses.

Farthing left the bridge and turned to the right down the slope leading to the tow-path. He tripped over a tuft of grass and fell, tearing the knee of his trouser-leg and breaking the skin beneath. Cursing himself for a clumsy fool, and inquiring of a

neighbouring tree why he could never keep his footing except on level ground, he dabbed the wound with his handkerchief until the bleeding stopped. This small misadventure did not improve his appearance. The black suède jerkin was spotted and dusty, the flannel trousers baggy, one leg now being torn. His hair was tousled and his face unshaved, his chin and nose having the pinched, sodden look of a poor devil down on his luck. The passion-storms had left their wreckage about him. His hands trembled, his eyes were brutish. Leaning over the bank he watched the broken image until, after the settling of the disturbed water, it pieced itself together. Even then the fullness of light behind it prevented him from seeing the worst; but he recognized enough to mutter 'Good God!', and to make an effort to tidy himself before appearing at the house. He washed his face and hands, ran his fingers through his hair, and shook out his coat.

This effort gave him courage, and he walked on, following the barge which was now a black speck in the distance. Half a mile along the path he reached a stone hut built over a pool where the women washed their linen. A small footpath led thence toward some cottages and the inn. The land on the right-hand side of this path belonged to Antoinette de Vaudrac. These few hundred acres, criss-crossed with flower-hidden streams, were the relic of feudal possessions, handed down through her mother's family.

The path led to the road, and a few yards further on stood tall iron gates, leading into a courtyard surrounded by a three-sided building. Everything was beautifully kept. The wrought scroll-work of the gates shone with black paint, and the tall brick pilasters, crowned with limestone balls, were scoured so that their age glowed through, like the faded blood in an old woman's cheeks. The grass edge along the wall was cut short in the English fashion.

Farthing stopped, hesitated, and tried the small gate at the side of the main portal. It was locked. That meant that his mother was out. He tried to control his trembling lip, and after another moment's hesitation, put up his hand and pulled the bell-knob. A loud peal rang out, and he heard an exclamation of surprise from the old *femme de chambre*. Then her head appeared round the door of the kitchen, which also served as a porter's lodge inside the gates.

She screwed up her eyes against the light, shut one of them, and with the other perceived Farthing.

'Mon Dieu! Le petit!' she cried—and with that the silence which had brooded over the village vanished. She bundled herself out to the gate, holding her clasped hands up to heaven, rolling her eyes, clucking and exclaiming and fumbling eagerly with the key which she had taken from a hook behind the kitchen door.

She flung her arms round Farthing, reached up and kissed him loudly on both cheeks, still uttering

incoherent cries of welcome. He patted her shoulder, trying to calm her, but she poured a thousand questions over him; had he lunched, how did he come, was he on holiday, or was he ill; and look at his clothes; she must patch that trouser leg; and *mon Dieu*, the skin was broken and would need some of her special ointment which he knew so well; ah, in those days when he was so high, so high, thus, and came home from the canal banks with cuts and stings and torn clothes.

'Is mother out?' he said, following her into the kitchen.

'Yes; it is market-day. She has gone into Nemours. There! There! Here is a cup of coffee, child. You must be weary after the journey. And where is your valise?'

'That's all I've brought,' pointing to the briefcase which he had flung on to the long, scrubbed table. He glanced round the kitchen. Nothing was changed. The huge stove with the tiny fire that was burning every day in the year from six in the morning until nearly midnight. The brass rail and knobs, the copper pans on the wall, and the cupola over the stove, shining like steel from its daily scouring with oil and energy. Festoons of garlic, and strings of onions, decorated the white-washed walls, and beside the dresser with its gleaming china, coffee-mill, glassware, and multi-coloured collection of household things, hung a large Nativity worked in wool, and framed in mirror-glass and mother-of-pearl.

The figures in this picture, which had come to the home thirty years ago with Marie, as it were her domestic dowry, comforted Lincoln Farthing. They were part of his life, and as a child he had consulted them when he was in trouble. They did not fail him even now. He stared at the Madonna, recognizing every crudity in the garish clothes, the hood, the eyes, worked in vertical black stitching. The drooping mouth, shapeless as a prune, seemed to suggest an unlimited compassion.

'Where is father?' he said suddenly, looking from the Madonna to Marie, who had taken his coat and now stood examining it. At this question she looked up, raised a hand as though invoking protection, and whispered:

'Hush! He is resting, dear soul. He *scratches* now only in the morning, and must sleep after lunch. Then at night he is not allowed to work; no, not even under that new strange lamp he was so proud of. Perhaps you will rest now, *chéri*, and then he may be awake. He has been so ill—' her voice trailed away into tears, and she had to dab her eyes with her apron. An expression of unhappy bewilderment crossed her face as she wailed: 'Oh, mon petit, why did you not come? He was so frightened that he might be taken—here she crossed herself—before he had seen you.'

'I couldn't—I couldn't—it was impossible.' Farthing was too emphatic. He made a gesture with his hand as though to push her away; but she would not be stopped.

'But you ought to have come, *chéri*. The good God——'

'Stop, Marie. I tell you——'

'Hush! He has heard you. He is awake! Perhaps the bell—he is calling.'

They heard a thin, tired voice from a room further down the same side of the building.

'Look! I will go first, and prepare him. He must not get a shock. He sleeps in the studio now. You did not realize, perhaps, what had happened? I should have written myself. Your mother may not have explained——'

'She explained nothing. She said he was ill, and I ought perhaps to come home.'

'Ah! Mon Dieu!' She turned away in disgust. 'There! He is calling again. I will go first.'

She took up a glass of milk standing on a wooden tray, and went out, hurrying along the path under the windows of the house. Farthing waited a few moments, beset with fears; then followed her to the studio, three doors along the path. Each room on the ground floor had a door opening on the courtyard.

He waited again at the threshold of the studio, until he heard his father's voice, only half-recognizable, calling him: 'Lincoln, is that you, my boy? Well, well!' A brave effort at heartiness.

With fear unabated, Lincoln entered. The room, too, was different. Everything had been shifted from the positions which he remembered since childhood. Perhaps his nervousness made

him notice these things first, before he dared look at his father. A single bed now stood in the further corner. The high desk, where Julius Farthing had always worked standing or perched on a clerk's stool, had been cut down so that the invalid chair could be wheeled to it to fit closely beneath the top. The walls had been repainted, and the few pictures rearranged. Leonardo's cartoon of the Madonna and Child with St. Anne now faced the light. On the same wall hung the artist's favourite etchings; a Dürer, a Whistler, and three modern copper-plates, two by Robert Austin, and one by Stephen Gooden. The old man believed these two English artists to be masters of the craft which he loved and practised so jealously.

A dumb-waiter stood beside the bench, loaded with bottles and instruments. The sunlight entering through the open french window flashed on glass and steel, so that these objects which Julius Farthing had handled daily for the past forty years now dominated the room. The old artist sat in the shade, hidden by Marie, who was bending over him rearranging a rug round the useless legs, and fitting a green eye-shade over his forehead. She brushed the wisps of scanty white hair across his brow, then took up the thin tapering fingers and chafed them gently, murmuring some unintelligible words as she did so.

She stepped aside and pushed the chair a little forward, and the light caressed the sick man's features. He lifted his head back to look from

under the eye-shade, and his beaky nose stuck out like an ivory pointer. His lips were thin, pallid, and shrunken, and he kept them set grimly in a half-conscious effort to control the tremor that intermittently seized the muscles of his face. The grey eyes, formerly so keen and small-pupilled, had darkened and dilated, giving a haunted look to the face. He had to focus his gaze afresh every time he looked at an object.

At this moment he was concentrating it upon his son, who stood between him and the light from the door.

'Lincoln!' he said, raising a hand from the arm-rest, and letting it fall again. 'It is good to have you back. Where have you been, my boy? This is a sorry state of affairs!' He spoke slowly, having to shape his words with reluctant lips and tongue.

Lincoln stared at him, speechless. Here was the man whom he worshipped and hated; the lifelong pillar of strength; the lifelong reproach; the man who had never once punished or blamed him; the most indulgent father; the most terrifying personality because of his singleness of purpose, his resolute self-dedication, his ceaseless industry within his vocation, and his otherwise gentle, vague weakness. That one streak of merciless hardness in him had made him world-famous, and destined doubtless to immortality along with the masters whose work he knew so intimately. Characterless, yet a great personality; that mysterious

and paradoxical combination which is called genius; elusive in friendship, disastrous in parenthood.

'Take care now, child, do not excite him,' whispered Marie; and she left them alone together.

The son wanted to explain that he had not known how serious the illness had been; but in his present state of mind, half-clarified by recent humiliation, he knew that he could not honestly say this. Shame seemed to be his portion now; blow after blow coming so unexpectedly, from such petty causes. At least, the others had been; but this—this was real and terrible enough. Its significance broke through even his defensive fantasy, and for a while the vanity, the fear, the pretensions, the malice, were thrust aside, leaving the real man naked in all his pitiable loneliness and immaturity.

'I ought to have come earlier, father,' he said.

'Oh, that's all right, my boy. You've had a job to hold down, eh? And that's a good thing these days. I like to think of you finding a niche at——' the old man paused. He was about to say 'at last,' but he felt that it implied a reproach. He continued—'at a congenial place. How is it developing, eh? Don't stand up there, can't you find a chair? I can't hop round for you nowadays, you see. But, thank Heaven, my hands are safe, so far. I can see pretty well, too, if I don't stick at it too long at a time. A couple of hours a day at the most! Rather a joke, isn't it, for an habitual fellow like me?'

He stopped, tired by this effort to reassure his

son, who had now drawn up a stool and seated himself near a wheel of the chair. Lincoln was trying to reason with himself, to explain away the shock by self-abuse on another issue. How could he, or anybody else, be expected to realize what a stroke meant? It was outside his experience, and he had pictured a mere fainting attack, a touch of temporary fever. But this! Again he dared not face the fact. The demon of fear, of perverseness, set him talking about himself, and the father sat listening patiently, wondering, perhaps, at the strangeness and incomprehensibility of this boy whom he loved, but uttering no sign of surprise at the lack of comment on his illness and helplessness. His pathetic question was left unanswered.

'I couldn't make anything of that job, father. I don't know! One thing after another—I can't explain; but it became absolutely unbearable. And one day I told the manager what I thought about him and his obsolete methods. My God, these French!'

'Gently! I love the French. They are the only people you know, Lincoln. Yes, including the foreigners. English, American, German, Russian—they all change when they come to France. She makes them half her own.'

'Even mother?'

He smiled at this question, and after a moment's thought replied: 'Your mother is a nation in herself.'

'Yes; that must be it.' Lincoln spoke bitterly; but after this they both laughed, and began talking

together with no further reference to the lost job, the failure of the younger man, the illness of the other. Lincoln wheeled his father up to the bench under the window and examined the work now in hand. He talked about it knowledgeably, for these processes were as familiar as his toys and school books.

In spite of physical disaster, the peace and industry of this old man's spirit had hardly been interrupted. He kept his fear hidden, and the tragedy of the scene was apparent only to those who had to watch and serve him. For one moment his son had seen it, and had fled. He talked now of trivialities: motor cars, sport, events, and people in Paris. But even so he could not quite evade the truth. Something disastrous had happened. One earthquake had followed another, and his world was tottering, adding chaos to his confusion.

He could no longer reproach anybody: his mother, his friends and helpers, for their constant warnings and criticism. Some inner confidence, a sham-confidence, had snapped after those nights of hell, spent with Miriam and Antoinette, the only women with whom he had been intimate—or tried to be—tried to be! His soul groaned within him. He cursed his birth, its incompleteness, and its ineffectuality. Whose was the fault? This poor, broken creature beside him, or that other—his mother, whom he must soon encounter: the woman who had robbed him of herself out of some obstinate zeal for his welfare, or her idea of his welfare? Mother-

less, yet too much mothered, what dread had been planted in his young body, what deficiency had he been constantly seeking to make up, from contact with Miriam, with Antoinette, with anybody who would feed him—nourish him back to mature life from an arrested and starved childhood?

Sitting with his father, half suspicious of the old man's delight and gratitude at his return, Farthing told himself that the search was over, finished and fruitless. Antoinette—yes, it was Antoinette, not Miriam—Antoinette with her artlessness had been too merciless in her discovery. She had destroyed his soul!

## CHAPTER XVII

### INTO OUTER DARKNESS

THE afternoon still being warm and sunny, Farthing wheeled his father through the french window out to the orchard. The trees were old, gnarled, and mossy. They stood deep in the second grass-crop, the sunlight fluttering about their boughs and glinting on the late fruit. Everything was silent and still. Sometimes an apple fell, rustling through the brittle leaves and losing itself with a little cushiony thud in the grass. Robins, and a few tired wasps and bees, seemed to be the only living creatures left under the trees. But as the

two men sat smoking and talking in undertones, nature's inquisitiveness produced other signs of life. Field-mice, frogs, beetles, moths, daddy-long-legs, all came to satisfy their curiosity. The orchard, that had been so ancient and autumnal-blind, was now an inquisition of eyes.

Julius Farthing, already content to put aside the unpleasant aspects of his son's return, stopped the conversation from time to time in order to point out one or another of these miniature eavesdroppers. He could not now see them distinctly, but a trained memory supplied that need. Each of these creatures, or, at least, their kind, had posed for him again and again. He knew by heart the secrets of their anatomy. No personal troubles could spoil that delight. Lincoln submitted to these interruptions without any outward sign of impatience. He was not interested, but now he was not active enough even to be bored, or puzzled by his father's childlike ability to lose himself in small objective pleasures.

At the end of the orchard a small waterway ran parallel with the canal, separated from it by a narrow strip of quaking-ground overgrown with reeds, rushes, and wild iris. Every night an orchestra of bull-frogs gathered there, and scraped its resinous notes. A few individuals were already tuning up. The men in the orchard could hear them along the line of poplars, which stretched, a tall, blue-green wall, right and left across the landscape. It gave a quality of finality, of secrecy, to the countryside,

as though the district were the bottom end of some gigantic garden—perhaps Eden; where every road, path, and stream, came to a halt, to be lost in the shadow of that melancholy, rustling, double rampart.

Father and son faced it now. Instinctively they sat thus, watching it and listening to it. The sun was resting on the edge of the trees, throwing down little runners of splintering light into the green fabric. Man-high between the trunks an occasional barge moved, sometimes in deathly silence, drawn by a mule, sometimes chug-chugging with echoless breath. As each barge approached the bend, the steersman sounded his horn, one long, fairyland winding, unnoticeable, yet dominating this Corot-world, and setting the tone of its character; slow, timeless motion gliding through timeless light and shadow.

The peace, the sleep-rhythm, were maddening to Lincoln Farthing. He lolled in the grass at his father's feet, smoking one cigarette after another, listening to the old artist's talk, which grew stronger as he became animated with pleasure and enthusiasm. The illness had interrupted many plans for work; but it had only interrupted: of that he made no question. He explained eagerly to his son, whom he still believed to share his delights, how he was making new experiments after a more careful study of the methods of the early German etchers. He was working on the first plate of a set of twelve illustrating the fables of La Fontaine. The subjects were made for him. His knowledge of

natural history could be fully exploited, and at the same time he intended to put his new theories into practice.

For once Lincoln was content to listen without being plagued by envy and the inevitable desire to go one better. The change in his father's appearance had shocked him into self-forgetfulness. From time to time he shot furtive and fearful glances at the figure in the invalid chair. It looked even more fragile in the open air. Julius Farthing had been a man of medium height, thin, but wiry; animated by an insatiable curiosity and innocent delight that could become fatiguing to people who had to live with him and share them. Though he was an unselfish man, and seemed to be quite without personal wants or any of the weaknesses, such as vanity, distrust, envy, that spring from self-consciousness, yet his concentration of energy into this intense and powerful objectiveness so vividly defined and distinguished him that he acted upon other people like an egoist. His dispassionate joy, his never-flagging good spirits and energy, dominated all comers, and while with him they had to succumb to his influence and put aside their individual troubles and grievances, and all the obscuring politics of self.

As he talked, the October afternoon waned. The sun slipped behind the poplars, flinging up a fan of moted beams over the sky. The air contracted, touching the skin with chilly fingers, and driving the summer relics of animal life back to

nest and hole and hibernating-place. An odour of water wafted over from the canal, and little wisps of mist rose above it, caught the sunlight, and writhed in scarves of rose and pearl about the trunks and branches of the poplars. The frog-chorus swelled, and down in the orchard an owl shrieked.

It startled both the men, and the elder turned his ivory-pale face toward the sound, smiling secretly at his own pleasure.

'Aren't you cold, father?' asked Lincoln, glad to escape from the long-sustained scene, yet dreading what must follow it. Voicing his fear, he asked when his mother would return.

'She went in by car from the Hôtel St. Hilaire, so she will be back any moment before dinner. I can smell it now.' He snuffed the appetizing wafts from the kitchen. 'Ah! Marie's onion soup. That's your particular brand, Lincoln. She's made that in your honour. The fatted calf will follow. We'll send down to St. Hilaire for a bottle of Mattay's special *rouge*, eh? You can stroll down and get it. Madame Mattay will make a fuss of you. Yes, I had better get indoors. These women make my life a minor hell with their cult of invalidism. However, so long as they let me work a bit——'

As Lincoln pushed his father back into the studio his mother entered at the opposite door leading from the courtyard. She made a slight grimace of shock and nervousness when she saw her son,

and stopped, facing him, throwing back her head, so that the waning light shone on her pale, freckled face, and accentuated the features and her likeness to the boy. Her weakness was momentary. Quickly clenching her fists, she stared at him, and thrust out her underlip, thus making the likeness even more apparent.

‘So you have come home at last?’ she said, speaking in German. Both men knew that this lapse into her native tongue preluded trouble.

Lincoln trembled, tried to reply, but could not. Julius held up a shaking hand to attract her attention.

‘Minna!’ he said in English. ‘He came as soon as he could. It was impossible while——’

‘Impossible?’ she replied, ‘I have never before known you so absorbed in your work. Your father might have died. Would you——’

Her coldness stung Lincoln, and he interrupted with such bitterness that she was forced to listen. The strangeness of his family relationship was emphasized by the contest of wills voicing itself in three languages. Fräulein Minna Spaeth continued to speak in German, while the men also used their native speech, Lincoln in habit and training being a Frenchman.

‘It wasn’t my fault,’ he said. ‘Your letter didn’t explain anything. You merely said I had better come, and I took that as—as——’

‘Well, as what?’

‘Oh, I don’t know, mother. You won’t let me explain. But it was as though you were accusing

me, suspecting me as usual. Can you wonder that I resented it?’

His voice broke. He could not appeal to her. These mutual accusations now were symbolical of the hopelessness existing between them. She had not seen him for nearly a year, and now that he stood before her, flesh and blood with their mysterious force dominated the conflict. She saw him afresh as her own child, on whom she had built her fierce ambitions, a fantastic erection of inherited Prussian spartanism, changed into impossible forces by her conscious revolt from this faith embedded in her bones. As a girl, she had rebelled against her position in her German home, resenting the subjection of women. Her violent feminism drove her out of her country, and she had lived in Paris as an art-student, supported by a pittance from an unrelenting father.

On his death this had been regulated as a legacy, and she had never gone back. The resentment was too deep. It had even made any relationship with men impossible. She had been known as the Amazon of Montmartre (she lived in a studio near the cemetery), until she met Julius Farthing, and succumbed to his non-masculine and certainly non-feminine personality. Upon the shy, ascetic-looking American, with gentle yet bright grey eyes and thin beaky nose, she concentrated all the emotional possibilities which she had hoarded from childhood.

Her abandonment was the talk of the colony,

and the only person who thought it unexceptional was Farthing himself. He loved her and wanted to marry her, but she refused to legalize the relationship. They spent a few experimental months in her studio, and then removed their *ménage* to La Genevraie. Gradually she had regained some sort of control over her passion, especially after it had resulted in the birth of Lincoln. Her pride, her rebellion, her fierce independence of spirit, had been offered the child as a birthright, taking a form not dissimilar to the parental tyranny from which she herself had run away. She had been determined to make him a great man; one who would spend his life fighting for the emancipation of women, and never insult them with the uses of the outworn chivalry, that memorial of woman's subjection in a Europe ruled by Mariolatry.

He had certainly learned this latter part of the lesson. The results, however, were not what she had planned. She was not even aware of his ability to borrow money from women, and to accept without even a twinge of discomfort all that they offered him in moods of compassion. And these were frequent, for he possessed some quality that attracted women—perhaps by reason merely of its indefinability. Even his mother, thwarted, bewildered, permanently resentful of his betrayal of her purpose, was not exempt. And this only outraged her the more, making her pervert still more cruelly the laws of nature by which a mother usually *knows* her child.

At this moment Lincoln's unfortunate faculty triumphed. His faltering explanation, part of his maddening general inconsequentiality, touched his mother, and to the surprise of both the men she suddenly turned aside, and put her hand over her eyes. They could see her shoulders shaking.

'I'm sorry, mother,' said Lincoln hoarsely; and he put out his hand and stepped towards her, touching her timidly on the arm. 'I'm sorry; don't listen to me. You know my savage tongue. Let's——'

'Minna, my dear—Minna,' pleaded the helpless figure in the chair. 'Don't, please—don't distress yourself. He's back again. That's enough, isn't it?'

She turned on them both, speaking roughly. 'Oh, you fools! Anything will do: this casual way of living: to no purpose.' But the spell was broken, and they refused to take her seriously. Lincoln even kissed her cheek as she picked up the glass of milk and held it to her husband-lover's lips.

The evening passed without further hostilities. For a while Marie presided over the scene. Every shopping expedition to Nemours was followed by this ritual. The string bags, baskets, parcels, packets, and loose items were heaped on the kitchen table and submitted to a merciless examination by this family tyrant, who in household matters ruled even her mistress.

Every one must attend the ceremony. Julius

was only too willing, for to him also these niceties of daily life were important. Texture, colour, shape, condition of things; the morality and quality of the market; the causes of its fluctuations; the people concerned in it, their characters, their changes and tricks and unexpected motives; he shared these tangible interests with the peasant, and built his universe on such symbols. They were the substance of his art.

Monsieur Mattay, the innkeeper and owner of the only motor car in the hamlet, had carried the shopping from the car to the kitchen, and now stood rolling a cigarette and brushing back his long moustache in order to lick the gummed edge of the paper. He stood defiantly, a shapeless peaked cap on the back of his curly head, his short legs wide apart, balancing a well-matured corporation. He never wore a coat, and his shirt-sleeves were permanently rolled, exposing mahogany-coloured forearms. Neither he nor his wife was a native. He was a French Swiss, and loved the mountains. He disdained to explain why he had settled in this flat country. Words failed him—a rare occurrence—when he referred to it and the people in it. He would spit, raise his stomach, shrug his shoulders, and ejaculate 'Bah!' from a tremendous pair of lungs. It was like a small mine exploding.

One subject alone could rouse him from his usual mien of mild contempt; and that was conscription. At the mention of military service he became possessed. His sleepy face lit up, his

moustache bristled, he inhaled slowly and deeply, and burst into a flood of Dantonesque oratory, strutting up and down an imaginary platform, smiting himself on the breast, plucking out his heart. Then, the eloquence subsiding, he would pour for himself a *vin rouge* and roll another cigarette. One gathered that having seen one war, he had no further use for armies; but this theme was so lavishly decorated that it was lost. It reappeared only in the facial contortions after the speech was finished.

Monsieur Mattay greeted Lincoln by suspending operations on the cigarette and addressing him over the breath-fluttering edge of the paper.

'So you have come home, hein? Ah, well!'

'How's madame, and the boy?'

Monsieur rolled his eyes.

'The boy? Ha! He grows. Mon Dieu! He will be as big as his mother!' And he chuckled. 'Eh, Marie? But he will not cook so well!' And he chuckled again. He was contented with his lot, so far as marriage went. He addressed himself again to Lincoln, like an *agent* to a gamin, but nobody minded this mannerism, for he was a soft-hearted fellow, and willing to help anybody. He was often on the premises, for besides keeping the inn (frequented mostly by the canal-folk, who slept in the stables beside their mules and horses), he tended the Farthings' garden. Their desire for an English lawn he regarded as a madness to be expected from foreigners. Nothing could

make him understand why a potential hay-crop should be sacrificed, and he would never cut the grass until reminded again and again.

He remained now, out of pure friendliness, to watch the inspection. Marie pushed him aside with her elbow, and he stepped back deferentially. He respected Marie. She also could cook. His huge horse-eyes goggled with amusement, flashing in the flame of the brass cigarette-lighter which he produced from a pocket of his blue trousers.

Marie began by wheeling her master up to the table, and stationing herself on the opposite side, like a customs officer waiting for passengers to open their luggage. Fräulein Spaeth, rather bored and condescending but, nevertheless, thoroughly cowed, stood at the end of the table, and piece by piece displayed all that she had bought in Nemours. Each item was seized by Marie, thumbed, prodded, scrutinized, smelled or stroked, according to its nature. Exclamations of rapture, joy, satisfaction, qualified approval, doubt, disgust, and horror emerged from her trance; for she was hypnotized by her own intensity, and spoke in flat, dull tones as she asked questions (ignoring the replies) and delivered her verdicts.

Madame *Farr-teen* (for so the German lady was called by everybody in the village, including the diplomatic *cure*), looking languidly down her short, freckled nose, showed a resemblance to her son. He stood behind her, watching this ceremony which he had known all his life. It was one of the

incidentals which he liked best to remember, for it recalled good humour, relaxation, and that idle pottering which he appreciated more than anything else in life. He, his father—to whom each article was shown by Marie—and Mattay occasionally offered some comment, which was either disregarded or received with contempt.

At last the vegetables, fruit, nuts, groceries, dairy stuff, a new petrol-stove, skeins of wool, toilet-roll, pillow-cases, aprons, and crockery were approved and disposed of, and the family was free to prepare itself for dinner. Marie turned to Mattay, abused him for an inquisitive vagabond, and poured him out a glass of wine. He tossed it off, murmured 'Bon appétit,' looked round, and selected a large basket, and walked out, singing, to his Citroën. He never left the premises without taking a basket; for something was always needed when he came along next time: a few logs, potatoes, lettuce, dandelion leaves, spinach, cheese, or bottles of wine. Even if monsieur needed a packet of cigarettes, Mattay would bring it up in a basket.

Lincoln walked across the courtyard to his own room in the wing opposite. Marie had made the bed and put out a clean shirt. He shaved, bathed, and put on the shirt. The result was reassuring, and at the summons of the hand-bell he emerged almost happily and crossed the courtyard to the studio, where dinner was served.

His mother wore a pale blue evening frock. With bare arms and neck, she looked gaunt,

sinister, and cold as she bent over the invalid, attending to him before pushing him up to the table. The task was a torment to her. Behind her gruff tenderness lay the dreadful memory of the scene when she had discovered him in the paroxysm of the seizure. It had occurred some months ago, but she could not rid herself of the fear, nor of the recollection that she had borne the burden of the subsequent days alone, watching by the unconscious and unrecognizable figure of the man for whom she had belied all her theories, and all the brave gestures made when she was a young girl, fighting against the traditions of her family and her country. Nor could she forget how she had sat by the bedside waiting for Lincoln to come home; the son whose character she had tried to mould since he was at her breast; whom she had loved fiercely with jealous anxiety, the passion of it indistinguishable from hate.

She did not blame herself that he failed her. The iron merely entered deeper into her soul. For days she had waited alone, half-conscious of the silence round her, broken only by the muffled sobbing of Marie in the kitchen or the whispering of Mattay and his wife, or the fateful sounding of the horn from a barge passing down the canal.

She remembered these things now as she sat opposite her son; and the mischievous desire to change him, to save him from his enigmatic and feckless self, again entered her heart. Her love for him, fierce as an evil temper, made her want to reach across the table and seize him by the hair,

to drag him out of that slouching posture, to wake him from that petulant expression which marred his handsome face.

From time to time during the meal he glanced uneasily at her. Julius was happy, and talked brilliantly, his old gaiety and delight in small things welling up again. He was completely content with this family circle and his work. He discussed the problems involved in his *La Fontaine* etchings, and thanked the gods that the stroke did not affect his right hand and arm.

'The left is a bit shaky still,' he said, holding up a trembling fork.

Mother and son looked at each other with fear and guilt in their eyes. His innocence, his complete lack of apprehension, were terrible to them. *Fräulein Spaeth* put down her knife and fork and ran her hand up and down her arm, as though feeling a wound by proxy. Fear made her more gaunt and angular, more formidable.

'Well, Lincoln,' she said, irrelevantly, 'you have told me nothing about your work.'

Lincoln woke from his painful reverie to hear these words—they were no less disturbing than his miserable contemplation of the possible cause of his father's disease.

'No?' he said. 'And what do you want me to tell you about it?'

'I should think——' she began, her voice hard again. But his nerves would hold out no longer. He had been practising restraint since he returned

home that afternoon; and this spell of continuous effort was unnatural. He suddenly snatched at his napkin, twisted it into a rope, wound it round his wrist, and pulled it tight until the hand went blotched and dead. This nervous touch was accompanied by facial contortions culminating in the usual demented staring of the eyes and thrusting out of the lower jaw and lip.

‘Whatever you think, mother,’ he cried, unnecessarily loudly, ‘it is all over; done with!’

‘You mean——?’ She was shrunken into herself at this outrage, and neither she nor Lincoln heeded Julius’s effort to pacify them.

‘Come now, my boy,’ he said, trying to carry on with the meal, ‘no need to——’

‘I mean——’ with voice breaking into a miniature scream, ‘that I’ve chucked it. See? It was impossible, and that is why I’ve been able to come home. You put the worst construction on my not coming, didn’t you? That’s inevitable; I knew it would be like that, so why bother——’ He was making a frantic effort to put his mother in the wrong. It was an eleventh-hour attempt to save his self-respect, already so badly mauled by recent experiences.

‘Minna, my love’—the quiet voice of Julius reappeared—‘let us carry on in peace to-night. *Please*, Lincoln, why all this agitation? We can’t help what *has* happened——’

‘You’ve lost your job again, that’s all!’ said the grim monitress of her son’s well-being. ‘Oh,

well, there it is. Now we must start all over again, I suppose.' She took up her knife and fork, then laid them down again and leaned across the table, pleading with the angry prodigal. But at this tone of conciliatory regretfulness he froze into apathy, the anger sinking down into a gloom utterly abysmal.

'Oh, for God's sake, let's forget it!' he murmured at last, weary of her references to conscience and high principles.

He was ashamed of his outburst, and the cowardice implied in it. The worst possible thing to do in front of the poor old chap. He savaged his food, glancing now and again at the crippled figure in the chair, fascinated by the suggestion of a death-mask which lay over the face. Perhaps the momentary agitation caused by the expected quarrel had flung that haunted look into the grey eyes. Or was it some deeper fear, for a moment left unguarded? Whatever the cause, even the self-concerned Lincoln saw it, and it burned into his dying spirit.

At the moment he was hardly conscious of this further blow. He acquiesced sulkily in the meal and in the truce silently proclaimed by his mother. Everything about her—poise, lift of fork to lips, manner of handing plates, subdued participation in Julius's renewed confidence—warned Lincoln that the truce was only temporary. But now she even allowed herself to talk about his future plans. He knew that there were no plans; could not be. Everything was in abeyance.

To confirm this irresolute resolution, Marie entered with the mail. Amongst the letters was a post card from Antoinette de Vaudrac, saying that she and her brother Charles, and possibly Hilaire, would be coming down in a few days, and that she longed to see them.

Minna read the card aloud, looking at Julius. She did not see the ugly glint in Lincoln's eyes, nor the way in which he turned his head slowly from side to side, like a hunted animal looking for a last avenue of escape.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### TWO CONFLICTING PROPOSALS

At first Wade was somewhat dismayed by Farthing's sudden disappearance from duty without any explanation. He expected Mr. Fletcher to blame him as the primary cause of all this disturbance of the ordered machinery of the household. On the morning when no Lincoln Farthing appeared, Wade insisted on going down to the library, although the doctors had agreed that he should remain in his room for another week.

He was only too glad to escape. In spite of everybody's kindness, and the daily visits from Mrs. Gould and Miss Fletcher, he had found solitude a burden that grew heavier and heavier

as his restless mind trudged through the hours. But apart from this, the wound was healing, and the enforced rest and sense of resigned helplessness had benefited his nerves.

He walked down the stairs feeling rather other-worldly. He smiled as he put out his free hand and patted the head of a sub-lifesize Cardinal Richelieu who stood before the window on the upper landing. No news was good news. Nothing further had come from England, that obscure little island which possibly was only a myth like the lost Atlantis. Somewhere within it, hearts were beating and claws were sharpening. But could that be true? Less than three weeks since he left London; and now the madness and misery were already dying out of his soul. He still lived on; eating, drinking and sleeping, mildly interested in things that passed by him, that touched him. But nothing stuck. And all those devastating emotions, heroics, and betrayals; how short-lived they were. If such spiritual events as those could not last, what *was* worth while? Life itself, the rolling earth, the sun, the texture of night and day woven into the deeds and moods and motives of men and women—all was a fantasy that had no first or last values.

He trod upon air: a wraith in a dream-world, where nothing survived; no tradition, no values, no contacts.

'Well, you 've returned to life?' He heard Mrs. Gould's voice as he entered the library. She was

sitting at the far end of the room, writing at one of the original pieces of furniture, her paper and pen, her arms and hands supported by little fat cupids and cornucopias. She looked up and smiled at him.

'Have I?' he said. 'I was just wondering. Slightly incredulous. Is it possible to return to—to——?'

'What?'

'That's just the problem. What?'

'I should leave that to the gods. You never know what they have in store for you. You are not, you know, quite——'

'Sane? Please say it!'

'I was going to say, not absolutely unattractive. And no doubt one or other of them—probably goddesses—will look your way.'

'Heaven forbid!'

She looked curiously at him before replying.

'Do you mean that?'

'Very strongly!'

'So, you still have ideas about life. You remember our talk? Instead of keeping an open mind and taking what comes—and letting it go again if things work out that way.'

'What is likely to come? Do you think I anticipate even that much?'

She got up and followed him to the table, where he had seated himself and taken up a bundle of letters. He looked up as she stood over him and put her hand on his shoulder. He felt the strength

of it, the animal warmth; no more. The influence penetrated no further than his flesh.

'Dear fool,' she said. 'You *are* a meek, gentle cynic, aren't you? So tired of it all, aren't you? And you have tried to be so fair and gentlemanly, haven't you? My dear, you come from a quaint old-fashioned world, rather like the Chinese court. You seem to think that——'

'You're patronizing me, Mrs. Gould. I'm tough enough to realize that.'

She leaned down and spoke close to his ear. He could feel her warm breath.

'You're not quite honest, are you? You're talking in terms of yesterday, I guess—*your* yesterday. And that's gone now—gone for good. Why do you keep looking round at it? You'll stumble again if you do that. What do these psychologists say? Relax! Well, can't *you* relax? Enjoy a good meal, and—and all the rest of it?'

He looked up at her. She was beautiful; the brilliance and fierceness softened by her sympathy.

'Yes, but *whose* meal?' he asked, smiling at her. She stooped lower and touched the tip of his ear with her lips.

'Any that's offered you,' she whispered.

He leaned back, and his head rested against her breast.

'I'll remember that, when—when I'm hungry,' he said.

They remained thus in silence, she pressing his

head closer to her bosom. He put up his hand and took hers.

'Josephine!' he said.

'Well? What are you going to say? Don't start believing in things again. That would only lead to disaster—let me warn you, Gregory. Do you see? I've got my views well squared, haven't I? Never look ahead; that's my practice, and it's no theory, it's the result of experience.'

'It sounds very—very plausible at this particular moment. Does—er—Monsieur de Vaudrac subscribe to it?'

She shook him and laughed.

'Hilaire is a realist, so far as women are concerned. He'll marry one day—but it won't be me.'

She walked over to her writing-desk, hesitated, and then returned to him.

'Look,' she said, 'I'm usually at my flat. It's in a new block of studios at the top of Montparnasse.'

'Ah,' he laughed, 'you're one of the rich Americans who keep the poor artists out of the studios!'

'Yes, I'm rich, but I'm also an artist—in my way! Well, here is the address.'

He took the card, and put it in his waistcoat pocket without looking at it. They both resumed work, and for half an hour neither of them spoke.

Wade tried to interest himself in the alien tasks, but the effort of will was not very productive. He was conscious that he was making this effort, and the work itself took a secondary place. He was

still haunted by bitter reflection. Even one's tragedies are nothing, they fade out and leave the mind empty. Empty! The word became a presence, a figure gesticulating to him with lewd and derisive motions. It danced before him, obliterating the papers.

This is contemptible, he told himself. Am I losing hold altogether? But he knew that it was not so; he knew that something was reviving in him. For years he had been physically deadened, his sluggish blood clogging in his veins, impervious to the chemical miracles of emotion and thought. He looked across the room at the light striking down on Josephine's head and shoulders. She was engrossed in her writing, her face expressionless, sombre, and handsome. The movement of her pen communicated itself, and the ear-rings which Hilaire had given her trembled to the rhythm of her writing. This incessant, sparkling life of the jewels only accentuated her stillness, pointing it with a force, a symbolism for the man observing it.

To his astonishment he found himself wanting to get up, to go to her, to offer something, and demand something. His cheeks burned, and he fought down the impulse. But to have felt it again, after four years in the tomb of the body—that was a matter for thought, for setting the stage afresh, and re-peopling it with characters. That is, if the impulse could be trusted. He repeated that certainty again and again, convincing himself that it was a certainty.

Satisfied with this temporary conviction he settled down to work until Mr. Fletcher entered. The old man looked gravely at him.

‘My dear fellow, what does this mean?’

Wade stood up and offered the chair as he replied: ‘It means that Farthing has not appeared. He may come yet, of course.’

‘But God bless my soul, Mr. Wade, he can’t come and go like this. How are we——?’

He waved his hand, as though to indicate desolation, chaos. Before he could find words to express his disapproval, Mrs. Gould spoke, turning her head and shattering the immobility in which she had been isolated.

‘*Can’t* he, father? You don’t know him; or you’ve been persuaded by Miriam to forget what he is. Why, I’ve no doubt he’s concluded that you are a baby at finance, and he can’t bear it any longer.’ She made a noise that sounded like spitting, as she jumped up and turned toward the two men, advancing step by step as she spoke.

‘But then, I’m outside this conspiracy to coddle that poor, frantic fool. The very sight of him sets me on edge. There’s something wrong, physically as well as mentally, with that feather-brained, conceited——’

‘Josephine, my love, you are too violent.’

Mr. Fletcher was in a benevolent mood. And he was not sorry to lose Farthing. The young man had a habit of stumbling over chairs, kicking against the table, and attacking the work

rather by a process of raids than by quiet, clerkly persistence.

'He seemed to be in a nervous state yesterday, when Monsieur Charles de Vaudrac and his sister met him in my room.'

Wade felt obliged to offer some sort of explanation. He was half inclined to be sorry for the poor devil, especially as this unaccountable woman was so obviously unjust and prejudiced. Why was that? And why had the charming Antoinette plunged him into that unwarranted passion? Was it so unwarranted?

Why bother to answer? These relationships had been going on for a long time, doubtless, and behind all this family friendliness lurked a great deal of unsavoury intrigue. One might be sure of that; for so the world was made.

'So you are falling under the spell, too, Mr. Wade,' said Mrs. Gould. 'Marvellous! I must study him more carefully. There's surely some quality I have missed!' And she laughed rather cruelly as she gathered her letters and licked the envelopes.

Her father shook his head and sat down before the pile of papers with which Wade had been juggling so clumsily.

'Well, I don't know, I don't know. Miriam seems to believe in him, and I trust her judgment. And then there is de Vaudrac. He is a sound business man—and how many times has he helped this——'

He stopped and looked up, surprised that anybody should enter the room during working hours. Miriam was followed by Charles de Vaudrac, who came over and shook hands with the two men. Wade saw the sisters in conversation, obviously about him and the cause of his disregard for doctors' orders. Miriam looked across anxiously, and Josephine shrugged her shoulders, picked up her handbag, and walked away. Charles was an enigma to her. Her armoury, though powerful, was limited, and she possessed no weapons with which she could meet him.

He bowed ceremoniously as she passed him, and then turned to her father, still utilizing the same gesture.

'Ah, Monsieur Fletcher. What is the latest development? Will France and America go to war soon, do you think? I hope not, for I should like to obtain a good commission over there; perhaps to decorate one of your magnificent town halls. You remember how much Puvis de Chavannes——'

'War? My dear young man—we cannot go to war! Neither can France. The finances——' and Mr. Fletcher rode his hobby-horse of international finance. It was a timid steed, and caused him more nervous excitement than pleasure.

Charles listened demurely, sometimes raising his downcast eyes and looking at Mr. Fletcher with meek earnestness. Miriam waited patiently until the lecture ceased, and then approached her father.

'I'm so sorry about Lincoln,' she said. 'I can't help feeling responsible for him! What is one to do?'

'You can do nothing, my dear. Leave the young man to his own folly. We have all tried to help him, and so have the de Vaudracs. But look at this for an example! He will *not* be helped, positively will not. Such utter recklessness! Where should we be this morning if Mr. Wade had not put in an appearance? Things are at a very critical stage, and I need undivided support if I am to steer my way through all these difficulties.'

He was becoming agitated and irritable, and Miriam tried to calm him by touching him on the arm. But he would not be restrained. He picked her hand off his sleeve as though it were a centipede.

'What do you want, child? I really must get to work. Now please go. Wade, let us begin. Pardon my haste, Monsieur de Vaudrac, but you will realize that I have been working at a disadvantage with that erratic fellow. Really, I am not sorry he is gone. I am victimized by my daughters. Miriam, you have imposed him on me, *imposed* him. And if Josephine—where are you, Josephine?—had not been so violent, Mr. Wade would never have been incapacitated. But I am glad to say he is better. Isn't that so, Wade? You are quite sure you are wise in coming down? But what I should do now, with nobody to——'

'Ah, yes, Monsieur Fletcher.' Charles was now aping the professional diplomatic manners of his

eldest brother. 'Mr. Wade has the most fortunate gift of being able to extricate people from their troubles. You know, of course, how he rescued me in Boulogne, and again at Amiens, within a few hours of his setting foot in France? Ah! That is a marvellous story of good omens and coincidence. And you know that his accident—pardon my insisting on this, I know that we are delaying your work—was the result of his effort to oblige my sister, who wanted——'

'Do shut up!' whispered Wade behind him. 'Clear out, d' you hear, and ring me up later in the day.'

'There you are, Monsieur Fletcher, he is already pushing us away from you—and rightly too. Come along, Miriam. Oh, but first—one moment more—what I came about was this. I expected to find you in bed. But Antoinette suggests that you may care to come with us on Sunday for a day in the country, to see her property in La Genevraie. That day of rest, Monsieur Fletcher? You would permit that, of course?'

This speech was accompanied by just the faintest exaggeration of appeal. Wade looked at Miriam, and she at him. Both were on the verge of laughter, and both dreaded that this mock helplessness might misfire and succeed only in irritating the old man still more. But they need not have feared. Mr. Fletcher looked puzzled for a moment, and stared over his spectacles at de Vaudrac, mystified at this incredible fellow. Then a papery smile creased his face, and he chuckled.

'Young man, you are very gifted.'

'Please make a note of that, Mr. Secretary.'

Charles flashed a hand at Wade, and turned to speak to Miriam, but he was interrupted by his brother.

Hilaire entered, hat and umbrella in hand. He bobbed his head to each in turn. 'Pardon! Pardon! I interrupt. But good news, Miriam. Good news. I have found something. Farthing! But where is he? I should find him here? A new film company. And I have secured him the promise of a post on the technical side. It is a good opening; and in that informal world he should be much happier; do you——'

But the blank faces around him were too depressing. He ended lamely, turning from one to another, finally becoming so embarrassed by their silence that he dropped his umbrella. It clattered on the floor, and Mr. Fletcher started so violently that Hilaire murmured 'Pardon!' as he stooped to pick it up.

The silence continued, and Wade watched de Vaudrac's confusion change to annoyance. Anxious to avoid another scene, he murmured indistinctly:

'Gone. He's gone.'

De Vaudrac slewed round and stared at Charles, thinking he had spoken.

'What's that?'

Charles, with a disclaiming motion of his hand, indicated Wade.

'He's gone,' said Wade, a little lower.

'Thank God,' added Charles.

'Thank God, you imbecile? And here have I been rushing round Paris for a week, nosing into every possible corner to find him something to do! Do you think my time is of no value at all, you feckless, irresponsible gamin? Do you imagine—?' He stopped, blew out his cheeks, breathed heavily, looked at Miriam, at Wade, at Mr. Fletcher, and suddenly relapsed into a helplessness that made him a ludicrous imitation of his young brother.

'But *where* has he gone? Miriam?'

At this appeal Miriam, who had been waiting serenely for the storm to pass, smiled at him.

'We don't know yet. He has not appeared this morning, that's all!'

'Ha! He'll be in bed!'

'No; I don't think so.'

'No, nor I,' said Charles, with such emphasis that Miriam looked at him. His quick eyes took the warning, and he knew at once that she was aware of his suspicions. For a second he rebelled. He was still angry with Farthing, and wanted to share his outraged family pride with his brother, for the better vindication of Antoinette. But this atavistic old-French-family feeling quickly gave way before his natural detachment and humour. After all, he was more contemptuous than angry, so why provoke Hilaire and possibly hurt Antoinette in the process? He looked at Miriam gratefully, and said no more.

Wade found himself explaining for the second

time that Farthing had shown distressing symptoms of nervous excitement. This fellow and the problem of his welfare were becoming rather a bore. Everybody, willy-nilly, had to interrupt their own work and interests to discuss him and to drag him away from the results of his folly. Even in absence he dominated the scene. The only person who refused to enter this conspiracy was Josephine, a sound and healthy realist. Once upon a time he, too, might have been gulled, but now he had no energy left to cope with a man who remained so childishy crude and undisciplined. Wade looked round to see if Josephine were still present. He wanted to show his co-operation with her in this matter; but she had gone. He wished he could follow.

In the midst of this determination to take no part he found himself speaking and was conscious that Hilaire was listening intently. These brothers were extremely shrewd and instinctively diplomatic in spite of their personal idiosyncrasies.

'Ah, Mr. Wade,' said Hilaire, veiling his eyes, 'that explains everything.' He smiled as Charles nodded.

'Absolutely. The charming giant will be back in a week to explain himself, and you will find yourself forgiven, Mr. Wade. He forgives everybody everything.'

Then, turning to Mr. Fletcher, he apologized again for intruding on working hours, adding:

'Then you will forgive us for snatching Mr.

Wade away from you on Sunday—unless, of course, you would accompany us. I have not asked Hilaire—we should need to consider transport. I have my own car, of course——’

‘*Mon Dieu!*’ cried Hilaire, ‘never again, my boy. You must sell some pictures and buy a new one—eh? Isn’t that possible?’

‘You are hopelessly out of date, Hilaire. To-day, artists do not sell pictures. They either advertise soap or cosmetics, or they live on their big brothers.’

Hilaire threw an arm round his shoulder and nearly felled him.

‘Do you hear that, Mr. Fletcher? The impudence of it!’

‘Quite, quite,’ said the old gentleman, not appreciating the joke, and wincing at the burst of laughter which followed it. ‘But you must excuse us now. I think it is rather late in the year for so long a trip. But Miriam, my love, would you care to go? If so, the new car——’ and he waved a hand, signifying many things.

As the deputation withdrew Charles approached Wade and spoke quietly to him.

‘You will come, monsieur? I should be so glad.’

Wade looked quickly at the eager face, and the eyes suffused with earnestness. He could not resist their appealing friendliness. He nodded, half embarrassed, and shook hands without speaking.

Left alone with Mr. Fletcher, he was surprised once more at the warmth in his heart. Who was

this young fellow that he could be capable of stimulating such sympathy and dragging one back to life? Then, quite irrelevantly, he fell to thinking of Josephine.

## CHAPTER XIX

### A PREMATURE SUGGESTION

WADE spent the rest of the week in settling down to a routine and to studying Mr. Fletcher's peculiarities. The work bored him and the man amused him. There was a certain teacup excitement in navigating one's way through the miniature storms, and in making headway during the periods of frosty sunshine. In his present negative condition, possessing neither a personality nor the desire for one, Wade submitted with deceptive docility to the odd, jerky exactions enforced by the moods of this rich valetudinarian.

He was so occupied with these that he forgot the legends of Mr. Fletcher's financial genius, and its capability of making momentous decisions and fearless reversals of policy. It was impossible to associate fearlessness with this papery, querulous figure that dreaded, as unhygienic, the contact of its own shadow. During the next few days, at least, no sign of the ruthless superman showed itself.

Wade recognized, however, that the experienced financier was uneasy. Most careful collocations

of stock-prices had to be prepared for his examination, and Wade watched with a certain amount of awe how deftly he read signs and portents into them.

The working day divided itself roughly into two parts. The long morning was spent in study and theorizing: the early evening, between four and seven, in acting upon the morning's conclusions. Nothing exciting happened, for Mr. Fletcher, as he explained in one of his expansive moods, was playing a waiting game. But there was sufficient minor buying and selling for Wade to get used to the technique. He had to sit at the telephone (for Mr. Fletcher would never use this germ-laden death-trap). The old man would sit upright in his chair at the table, pencil in hand, cuttings and notes carefully arranged before him. Then, through Wade, he addressed himself to the markets. As the pace quickened, and Wade's pale cheeks flushed, the upright figure would lean forward, hand conched behind the huge ear, the brittle voice exclaiming: 'Eh? What's that? Have you got it right? Tell him——' No hesitancy there; but nothing very dynamic.

Between lunch and four o'clock, and for the rest of the evening after seven, Wade's time was his own. He was not yet strong enough to utilize it freely. Nor could he think of anything he wanted to do. He spent two afternoons reading and dozing in the garden, grateful for the silence, the warm sunshine, the peacefulness of this autumnal pause.

He had not yet answered the two letters which had accompanied him from England. They could wait. Everything could wait. Nothing mattered. He could do no more. The effort of concentrating on the problem filled him with terror and made him wonder if his reason had gone. He could not think responsibly and consecutively for two minutes. Day-dreams and wayward fantasies broke into his mind, stirring him to sudden squalls of passion that left him appalled. Death, spite, cruelty, lust, all flooded his empty spirit, carrying vivid images that he could not distinguish from the actualities around him.

Why submit to such torture? After all, the matter was simple and need not occupy his mind. He resolved to write to his lawyer, and say that he could do no more than give a third of his salary to pay the children's school fees. The *woman*—vague, impersonal word covering the past like a drift of dead leaves—the woman was well off, happily and comfortably married.

He nodded off into sleep, leaving the problem of the Inland Revenue still unsolved. A mongrel dog, belonging to Jacques, came up and sniffed him, approved, and lay down with its head on his foot. Sparrows fluttered round, throwing shadows that passed over the sleeper's face like the fingers of a mesmerist. Half an hour passed; then the dog twitched and whimpered, and woke the sleeping man. He looked up to find Miriam standing before him. Her face was blank, heavy with

thought, and when she spoke her voice was almost inaudible.

‘Won’t you take cold, Mr. Wade? You are not too strong yet.’

He looked up, still bemused with sleep, stretched his limbs and winced.

‘Why, Miss Fletcher—Good Lord! look at this little beggar. Where’s he come from? Hallo, son, you had a nap, too? Yes, it is chilly. Brrrrr! I’ll go indoors, I think.’

She touched his hand and exclaimed:

‘You’re frozen. We shall have you in bed again.’

‘Oh, no. I’ve had enough of this sort of thing. Too much kindness is dangerous, Miss Fletcher. It puts a man off his guard.’

‘Have you had too much, then—and is it so necessary to be on your guard?’

‘It’s a trick I’ve acquired during the last few years.’ He laughed, and added as he rose stiffly: ‘Not that I’ve anything left to guard.’

She looked at him again, and he saw in her eyes a sympathy belied by her words.

‘You’re too sorry for yourself, aren’t you? Don’t you find it monotonous to keep on that one theme?’

‘Yes, I beg your pardon. I’d no intention of boring you.’

She was smiling as she replied, and her voice was rich with a laughter that he could not resent.

‘Come and have tea then. Josephine and Hilaire are waiting, and we want your advice——’

'Good Lord! my dear young lady, *I* can't give advice; why, I'm only——'

'Wilful and proud and sick, aren't you, Gregory Wade? Obstinate as a mule, when people try to help you merely because they take you for what you are.'

She was devastatingly outspoken. He could not combat that serene detachment represented by the wide-set eyes, the poise of the figure. In itself it was impregnable. Suddenly made benevolently aggressive by her quick sallies of ruthless temper, it was overwhelming. Wade tried a sulky defence.

'For what I am? Yes; I should like to know that. *What* am I?'

'Well, for one thing, you are an architect; and that is what I wanted to consult at the moment. We can leave the rest, or take it for granted.'

'I'm sorry,' he said, smiling, 'and at your service.'

They entered the house together, leaving the dog in the chair that Wade had warmed. Miriam had a bedroom and sitting-room on the second floor, over the large salon. The window of the sitting-room overlooked the garden of the adjoining mansion, out to the Bois de Boulogne. The sun hung low over the trees and misted the window-panes. Silhouetted against the light sat the substantial figures of Josephine and Hilaire de Vaudrac, united by the mingled smoke from their cigarettes which hovered above the open window and drifted back into the room on the afternoon breeze.

Josephine put out a lazy hand to greet Wade. He had not seen her since the morning she had given him her card. She appeared now to be in one of her moods of recoil from her own luxury. She was dressed in a coat and skirt of dark green, with a tight-fitting hat to match, everything severely and superbly designed and cut. She wore no jewels except an old cameo brooch and small amber earrings. The autumnal colour, the long sleeves and high-necked blouse, clouded her splendour and thereby increased it.

Wade looked at her, and was aware of de Vaudrac's eyes examining him with shrewd amusement. But that was only for a moment. Tea and conversation pushed all these subtler perceptions into the background; and Wade lost his self-consciousness as Miriam talked about her more definite plans for opening a millinery shop in the Boulevard des Italiens. She had succeeded in interesting Josephine, who was putting up a quarter of the money. Hilaire was doing the same, leaving Miriam to hold the remainder of the capital and to run the business. The suggestion now was that Wade should collaborate with Charles de Vaudrac in the fitting up and decorating of the premises.

While Miriam put the idea to Wade he sat looking down into the sickle of light dancing in his teacup. He knew that all three of them expected him to jump at the offer. It was wonderful; a new start; a return to his own work after two years

of idleness and despair. It would mean a delightful collaboration with that attractive young artist. It would be well paid and might lead to other commissions. Nothing stood in the way. No; nothing at all.

Josephine was lying back, watching something over the trees. The smile of pleasure was fading from Miriam's face. Hilaire breathed heavily, his patience oozing away as Wade said nothing, made no move. Everybody grew more and more distressed until at last Hilaire raised his head and stared at Wade. What he saw arrested him. He was about to speak, but he could say nothing, and what might have been an outburst of anger subsided into a frightened, appealing glance at Miriam. Josephine still looked out of the window, swinging her foot. But when Wade spoke she turned her head quickly. The cup of tea was trembling in his hand. His face was white and drawn, and beads of perspiration bedewed his forehead. As one of them trickled over his temple, he put up a hand, fumbled for his handkerchief, failed to find it, and brushed away the salt drop with his fingers.

'I'm sorry,' he said at last. Then he suddenly poured out, in a high-pitched voice, an almost incoherent argument against an imaginary adversary. The listeners gathered from this that the whole idea was impossible, cruel. He had given up all such work. It had been a failure, they could not appreciate why, nor could he explain; but it was a fact.

Utter and disastrous failure, financially, artistically, and—and in every other way. This last vague specification moved him so violently that the teacup jerked out of his hand and rolled under the chair.

He was not so distressed as to fail to see the anger in Miriam's eyes as she sat looking at him.

'I'm so sorry,' he gasped, fumbling for his handkerchief. But before he could do anything to mop up the tea soaking through his trouser-leg and staining the carpet, the handkerchief was taken from his hand. He was conscious of Miriam sitting aloof, of Hilaire drooping dejected with embarrassment, and of Josephine kneeling and ministering, carefully wiping the soiled garment.

'I'm so sorry,' Wade repeated, leaning over her. In reply her hand pressed the calf of his leg, and she looked up swiftly. Her eyes were bright with mischievous laughter—and also another hotter light which he did not dare to interpret.

'I guess you've upset the apple-cart,' she said, 'spoiling all the nice-laid plans.' Then speaking louder, she included the others, whose business instincts had been so outraged by Wade's cowardice. 'Give the poor man a chance, you tough go-getters. Your energy would give the world a headache. I reckon this isn't his last word on the matter. You can think things over for a bit, eh, Mr. Wade? Now look, you'll need to change your suit.'

She got up, dropped the wet handkerchief on to the tray, took a cigarette, and went to Hilaire for

a light. He looked at her suspiciously, while Miriam studied all three of them. Her anger had vanished, and with her usual serenity restored she contemplated this new situation—or what promised to be a new situation. She found new hope in it, and with that hope she could forgive Wade anything, although her faith in him might be damaged and her respect impaired. Watching her sister and Hilaire she sensed the challenge offered by Josephine, and she knew that Hilaire accepted it with more relief than jealousy.

'Let us talk it over later on, Mr. Wade,' she said kindly, as he stood up. 'And do discuss it with my sister. She is incredibly sane; are you not, José?' She had added this advice without thinking. Something deeper than thought impelled her, and she looked at Hilaire for his sanction of what she had said. But he would not betray himself. He sat, very pale and non-committal, smiling enigmatically at the smoke of his cigarette. She had never known him so self-controlled and thoughtful.

## CHAPTER XX

## SPIRITUAL RECONNOITRING

UNTIL the day of the trip Wade was too busy to be able to give any thought to Miss Fletcher's suggestion. Once or twice when his mind lapsed from the excitement of work, he recognized dully that he had let an opportunity slip, and that his new friends must have reconsidered their opinion of him. Twice he met Miss Fletcher in the house, but she said no more about the matter. She was friendly, but guarded and formal, and he could make nothing of these encounters even had he wished to do so. He did not see Hilaire or Josephine again until he joined them as one of the car-party, which included also Miss Fletcher, Antoinette, and Charles de Vaudrac.

The Sunday morning was cold, and a frosty mist lay over the ground. Paris slept beneath it, unwilling to open her eyes and behold this first sign of winter. For the first ten miles Wilson crept watchfully along, feeling his way through the suburbs. Wade sat beside him without speaking. He had chosen to ride outside in order to escape the obligation of chatter, and also perhaps because he wanted an opportunity to be alone with himself for an hour or two after a feverish spell of work following so closely upon convalescence.

It was almost pleasant to be carried through that

vague morning-world where nothing except immediately passing objects engaged his attention. The car prowled on, silent as a cat, held in check by Wilson who stared ahead with apparent carelessness, not moving his head even when he spoke to the hunched-up figure beside him. Trees emerged, hovered, and withdrew; an occasional car passed; the mist twined and streamed round the car like a ship's wake; all in slow-motion.

The effect was both soothing and stimulating, and Wade was content that he could relinquish himself neither to brooding nor to observation. His mind and nerves hesitated between the two. He was aware of a mood stirring within him, and lazily he attempted to prove whether it was some new interest or merely a twinge of the dying powers of remorse. He knew that he had no cause to be pleased with himself. Here he sat, self-exiled, because of his weak-minded hysteria, from the company of those sane and happy people behind him. He heard them chatting and laughing, their voices muffled by the glass-screen shutting him off from them. Sometimes he turned his head half wistfully to peer into the car, trying to read their faces. But all he received was a perfunctory smile, or nod, or wave of the hand from one of the five who might happen to give him a moment's attention. They were only half real.

Gradually the sun rose above the mist, passing from red to white heat, and from heat to universal light that began to play upon the earth, opening

itself over the blue canopy and descending thence with a warmth and vitality that drew up the mist, dissolved it, and revealed an autumn scene fingered by the first frost. The tree-foliage hung lank and matted, and drops rolled off the dejected leaves, splashing on the windscreen or thumping on the roof. Where the sunshine fell the frost had melted, but every patch of shadow was still grey, the patterns of light not quite coinciding with the patterns of frost.

Bushes and longer grasses stood shrouded with frost-laced spider-veils, and single threads of half-invisible silver hung across the road from tree to tree. The world lay silent, except for the purring of the Daimler and the drippings from the trees. Wade leaned forward intently; he was listening to something not actual: the rustle of earth's tattered cloak as she gathered its once-gorgeous glories round her for protection against the cold.

By the time the party reached the northern edge of the woods of Fontainebleau the mist had disappeared. Wilson was now able to relax a little, and he tried to engage Wade in conversation.

'You're looking much better, sir,' he said. 'This life's a holiday, I reckon. I've never had such a peaceful time since the war.'

'Yes; those were idyllic days, weren't they?'

Both the men laughed, and their talk steered towards the inevitable magnet, flowing on until it was interrupted by a tapping at the screen.

Charles was pointing up one of the wide military rides, and making signs for the car to stop.

Everybody got out, throwing off coats and cloaks and raising town-pale faces to the sun. Profound silence held the world. Gradually it yielded little secrets of sound; drip, drip from the leaves; crisp breaking of hoar-frost; rustle of soil expanding in the warmth of the sunlight; and the distant drumming of hooves on turf. Half a mile away up the slope of the ride a cavalry platoon was exercising. The tiny horsemen flashed as the ballet proceeded. Follow-my-leader in single file they galloped, describing circles, figures of eight, a distant living geometry of beauty. The spectacle was a fantasy, a Watteau-piece, taken from the seventeenth-century life of the palace beyond the trees: powder-blue, roan, black and white, with glitter from harness and blade.

Charles stood staring, with Antoinette on his arm. His lips moved as though he were trying to fit unspoken words to the rhythm of the cavalcade. Wade glanced at him, fascinated by the excitement in his face; admiring and envying such power of spontaneous delight. Antoinette saw the glance, and returned it with a look of puzzled inquiry. It was so eloquent that Wade fancied she had spoken to him. A moment later he found himself beside her.

‘What did you say?’ he whispered.

She showed no surprise at the question. Perhaps she, too, was caught by this illusion of eloquence.

‘What did *you* say?’ she replied.

She withdrew her hand gently from Charles’s arm; and this action seemed to bring her nearer to Wade. He looked down at her. A wisp of black hair had escaped from the little astrakhan toque, and a passing trail of spider-thread clung to it.

‘You are growing old,’ Wade said, wondering at the happiness in his voice. ‘There is silver in your hair. Permit me!’

And gently he took it between his fingers, presenting the almost invisible trophy to her.

‘I’ve made you young again.’

She looked at his hand, and from that most disconcertingly into his eyes.

‘I hope I shall do the same for you,’ she said.

‘Why do you hope that?’

The half playful, half prophetic conversation was broken by a shout from Hilaire. He too, but in his own way, had been spellbound by the spectacle of the cavalrymen, and when suddenly the leader halted with upraised hand and a word of command that came faintly, a ghost-cry, down the ride, Hilaire could contain himself no longer. He snatched off his hat and held it aloft, startling the party with a shout of boyish pleasure. The soldiers heard it, too, for a chorus of cries broke from them, and an agitation of hands and pennons. Then for several moments long-distance greetings passed between the two groups of humanity, primitive and irresponsible signs of pleasure by mortals overawed by the stillness and silence of nature.

During this absurdity, both Wade and Mademoiselle de Vaudrac perceived that their tiny *tête-à-tête* had interested Mrs. Gould. Recalled by the general excitement, they caught her smile of quizzical amusement withdrawing itself from them. So far from being disconcerting, it offered a suggestion of intimacy and understanding; more, certainly, than Wade and Antoinette would have contributed for themselves.

This pleasant interlude finally roused Wade from his lassitude, and during the rest of the journey he talked with Wilson, attentive both to the conversation and to certain inward urgings toward a sense of adventure. Once he dared to turn round to find that Antoinette was watching him. He smiled at her, but her response was not immediate. Before returning the smile, she startled him with a look of fear and sadness. After that he stared doggedly at the road, more disturbed than he dared to admit. The memory of her eyes and their momentary appeal remained in his mind, a starting-point for a train of thought leading him on to intimations of hope and renewed life. He had almost forgotten such mental activities were possible, and he settled down into himself, marvelling at this pleasurable folly.

Down through the royal forest he followed these thoughts, over roads patch-quilted with flaming leaves. The arches thinned overhead, sometimes exposing bunches and knots of mistletoe. The forest grew more and more drenched in colour as

the air cleared. The madness, the sensuous glory of it acted like wine upon the people in the car. All of them, except Charles, let the intoxication master them. He seemed to be slightly disgusted with nature for this almost riotous sentimentality, this orgy of latter-day splendours that were only inflated regrets. Miriam rallied him for his increasing gloom, and he mischievously asked her if she would like her shop to be decorated in umbers and gamboge, gold and crimson.

Hilaire thought this too good a joke to be wasted, so he leaned out and repeated it to Wade, who nodded his head and smiled wearily. But he was far from being amused by this reminder of the shop. He asked himself if Antoinette knew of his refusal to collaborate with her brother. Was that the reason why she had looked at him so reproachfully? If so, she was well justified, for at this moment he could not explain why he had turned the offer down. Were he asked now, would he refuse again? He believed—he dared to hope—that he might not; that this new warmth in his blood—this incredible sense of companionship and the establishing of relationship with at least one or two fellow-beings who could be trusted—would give him confidence to look back at the past, to rescue the technique associated with it, and would urge him to apply those powers to this new effort, this test so generously offered.

The mere contemplation of this possibility set his blood tingling. He asked himself what was

happening, if at last some change were taking place where he had given up all idea of change. Time and treachery and the residue of self, these had been the only constants for years past, the one ringing upon the other a deadening monotone of despair and apathy. No, no; he could not believe in any other self, any other rhythm of existence. Time would tell out the tale; treachery was an accomplished certainty; and the residue was only too familiar: a death in life, a mockery of action.

As the car slowed up through the narrow high street of Montigny-sur-Loing, Wade peeped out over his upturned collar, and bestirred himself. The excitement of these unexpected accessories of hope had wearied him, and he wanted to escape from his own thoughts. Down the hill, over the bridge, the car swept, while Wade forced himself to renew conversation with Wilson, who glanced sidelong from time to time, anxious to identify the vagaries of this fellow-countryman. He recognized something unusual, and put it down to shell-shock. He knew what that meant, and was oblivious of his own fixation of mind, which led him to attribute most of the accidents and waywardness of life to a war-time cause.

'Trip's done you good, sir,' he ventured, after he had cleared the town and was speeding along the straight strip of road to La Genevraie. 'Though you do look a bit tired like. Took it out of you, didn't it, that funny little upset? It's my opinion——'

'For God's sake, don't have any opinion, Wilson,' said Wade irritably, annoyed that everybody treated him as a specimen of abnormality.

'No, sir,' said Wilson, now thoroughly convinced of his own views. But he had no opportunity for further comment. Charles was at one window, and Hilaire at the other, shouting directions to him. They were near the village, they had passed through it; they had turned to the left before a pair of wrought iron gates with brick piers surmounted by stone balls; they had climbed a sharp hill that looked back over the hamlet and an endless line of poplars, and they stopped by a long, rambling cottage standing back from the cross-roads, shaded by two gigantic beech trees, forerunners of the woods on the summit of the hill. On one of the trees hung a faded poster announcing a Whitsuntide fair to be held in the neighbouring town, Nemours. Long after the event this sun-bleached print announced the most garish attractions.

Hilaire was the first to leave the car, and he ran to the poster, posed grotesquely before it, and announced the items, waving his hat and thwacking the tree with his walking-stick. A roadman sitting on a heap of stone, eating his midday lunch, looked up solemnly, grunted, and said: 'That's all over long ago.' Everybody laughed, Hilaire and the peasant slapping their stomachs and producing identical Rabelaisian noises from their huge lungs.

Wade was thus introduced to Antoinette's

cottage through a veil of laughter. As he entered he had to wipe the tears from his eyes in order to see his way over the threshold.

'Come in, welcome, Mr. Wade,' said Charles, holding back the door. He too was still laughing, while booming over Wade's shoulder roared the cannonade of Hilaire's mirth.

So this is their home, thought Wade, still half incredulous of his interest in this brother and sister. He did not notice that they were watching him as he stood with Josephine and Miriam, who were abandoned to the mood of gaiety set by Hilaire. Mrs. Gould turned to Wade, seized and unbuttoned his coat and removed it carefully over his injured arm. Their eyes met, and he smiled impudently. He wanted to summon up an appearance of respect, but he could not.

'What's amusing you, Gregory?' she said, her voice so low that only Miriam heard her. At this use of his Christian name, Miriam turned away, lifting her shoulder with a gesture of distaste. But at the same time she looked swiftly and eagerly at Hilaire.

'Why, do I seem amused?' said Wade, all his attraction towards her held in abeyance. 'I'm only contriving to add my share to the general happiness.'

'Oh, how damned judicious! Just the little English gentleman, eh? Isn't that——'

'Don't bully me, then,' he said, determined to hold her off, but unable to resist the attraction of her deep voice and provocative invitation. Why not? urged his demon of perversity; she is insistent; she

is likely to lose nothing; why not feed your cynicism on her greediness?

Actually, however, he was bored. He wanted to get away from her, and he was apprehensive, slightly ashamed, lest Antoinette or Charles—why Charles?—should notice the sense of conspiracy with which Josephine held him. Surely everybody must see it; especially Hilaire, who had good cause to be observant. But Hilaire was staring at them with eyes that blandly refused to see anything unusual. Perhaps he was blindfolded by his own good humour, or his interest in Miriam with whom he was talking so freely.

Antoinette approached with a glass of white wine which she handed to Josephine.

'Would you like to look at the cottage, Mr. Wade?' she asked. 'Charles will take you. Do you like this room? It is his work.'

Wade was able to praise without stint. He had been admiring ever since he entered. The first impression was one of surprise, for the exterior of the cottage had led him to expect low, dark rooms. But Charles had removed the ceiling and carried the room up through the two stories. This, with the doubling of the upper windows back and front, gave light and space for the austere decoration: deep cream walls and ceiling, grey painted floor and woodwork, including table and chairs, neutral curtains and upholstery in a woollen material—polished steel slow-combustion stove, and one large picture of the canal painted in enamels.

Charles waved his hand deprecatingly when Wade praised him, but he was pleased and almost eager in his offer to show the architect the rest of the house. Wade congratulated him again on the decoration of the four bedrooms and Antoinette's little boudoir.

'Where do *you* work here?' asked Wade, as they came down by a second staircase to a large kitchen behind the living-room.

'Oh, I never really work anywhere,' said Charles, 'but you may like to see.'

He was gratified by Wade's inquiry, and the two men walked out into the garden up a brick path bordered by box-edging still aromatic under the warm sunshine falling between the fruit trees. For the first time they were able to consolidate the tentative approaches hitherto made in the presence of other people. Neither dared quite to trust the warmth, the delight, and surprise which he felt as he glanced shyly from time to time at his companion. But both were content to accept the miracle performing at this very moment in a setting so harmonious; a sense of arrival, of recognition, of gift-sharing and consolation, in a world of golden harvest.

Charles led the way down the garden through a clipped portal in a high yew hedge screening the vegetable garden and orchard, and out to a small clearing beyond the trees, bounded by a four-foot stream slipping briskly towards the village.

Almost overhanging the stream stood an old

brick outhouse, which Charles had re-tiled and fitted with a north light.

'This is where I work,' he said, unlocking the door and following Wade in.

Again Wade had a sense of spaciousness and light. The brick walls were whitewashed, and the frame and ledge of the window facing along the stream and orchard-end were of plain oiled wood. There was no fire in the stove, and the place smelled confined and ivy-mantled through being shut up.

The visitor looked round, walked to the window and peered out at the water, the trees, the sunshine; turned round and noted the large easel, the well-used cabinet of drawers, the canvases stacked on the floor, the dusty table, the divan, and folding-chairs.

'Yes,' he said gravely, nodding at his host and taking a cigarette. They stood opposite each other puffing in silence, both offering from time to time a countering glance of satisfaction. 'Very restful.'

'You think so?'

'I do. It's a place one could work in.'

'Why will you not work in it then, Mr. Wade?'

They were both startled by the abrupt question, and looked at each other almost with a guilty surprise. Wade knew at once that Antoinette also must have been told of his weak-minded refusal of Miss Fletcher's offer.

'I'm sorry,' he said, pretending that he did not understand, 'but it would be rather incredible to imagine high finance being carried on here.'

‘Quite,’ said Charles, his eyes suddenly veiled by that mock-modest drooping of the lids; usually a prelude to some diabolically clever sally of seeming innocence. ‘I have noticed, of course, how passionately absorbed you are in that occupation.’ Then he changed his mood suddenly, looked up, his eyes bright with that appealing candour which had already so disarmed Wade.

‘I had hoped that you and I were going to work together. You see, it would be an experiment for me. I have never in my life been able to work with anybody—being rather a spoilt child. Is it impossible, Mr. Wade, for you to reconsider your decision, whatever the cause may be?’

He spoke quickly, and Wade had no time to become defensive, even had he wished to. But he did not; he wanted only to respond as generously as this charming fellow had given; to justify the interest, the faith, the affection so openly offered. He could not understand the reason for this gift. There was no reason. The whole relationship was illogical, absurdly youthful and idealistic. But he welcomed it, recognized its inevitability, its growth from that moment on the road to Paris when he put his mackintosh round the slightly pathetic and ridiculous figure.

He tried now to find words to reply, but his throat was constrained by the blood pulsating there. The battle! The battle was raging again—the dead were near; the hopes, the ambitions, the ideas; risen from the field where they had fought and

retreated and fallen. He was almost ready now to risk another betrayal, to give himself with what remained of the half-forgotten innocence and delight and enthusiasm.

'It's very good of you, Charles,' he said, his voice trembling. 'I wish—I wish—I could explain. Life has let me down badly since the war. Something broke at last—I'm afraid of it—afraid of myself. There's no trust left in me, don't you understand? I have been trying to get away from all that—to cancel everything out—even my own work. There's no relief left there, even.'

He spoke with such an intensity of misery that de Vaudrac put out a hand as though to touch him.

'You say too much, perhaps, Gregory. You may have become wilful, determined to think life is over, the adventure done. But is that true? And if it is true, is it not common to everybody? I think that that terrible Bergsonian Duration betrays us. It is not people. They are only victims, too. I am younger than you; but I see now that Time is a drug, slowing down our instincts, blunting our reactions. It ought to be our ally, bringing us experience and accumulating wisdom and skill. But since our experiment of living is determined between birth and death, we are poisoned by what should be our food.'

Wade stood silent, looking on the ground. He had nothing to say. This sudden metamorphosis of the shy, half-derisive Charles nonplussed him. He wanted time to assimilate these arguments so

obviously long-matured. He wanted to reconsider his estimate of the man as well as the value of what he offered. Meanwhile, here before him was the actuality, the person; a mystery, and a very disturbing revelation breaking upon his own life.

But before the frozen will could be brought to act in the face of this reality, an interruption came from outside. The door opened and Antoinette appeared.

She looked from one to the other, instantly aware of the depths into which they had plunged.

'You are both serious,' she said. 'Are you already discussing my plans for the hotel? But now is not the time, for we all need lunch, and Madame Mattay—but you have yet to meet her, Mr. Wade.'

As neither of the men responded she approached them, and laid a hand on the arm first of her brother and then of Wade. They realized at once how close together they had been standing. Both, half-embarrassed, took a step back, so that Antoinette's hands dropped.

'What is it?' she said more earnestly, a little gleam of fear in her eyes. 'What has happened?'

Her brother laughed.

'Toni, you look like the tragic muse. Nothing has happened. I have merely asked Gregory why he——'

'You will forgive him, Mr. Wade, I hope. You see he is so used to having his own way. It is only when he is occasionally thwarted that he

becomes like the rest of the family—eloquent and often violent.'

'Please let me consider it again,' Wade broke through her efforts to ease the tension. 'I have not had time, Mademoiselle de Vaudrac; you must not blame me. It is a disturbing matter, and—and——'

He broke off, putting his hand to his mouth and fumbling at his lips with trembling fingers. Charles and his sister exchanged quick glances of concern.

'Well, Mr. Wade, why should you distress yourself?' said Antoinette, smiling at him. 'I think, for one thing, we are all nervous with hunger. You have not even had your *vin blanc*. You, Charles, run to the house and tell the others we will set off at once.'

Charles went out, saying that he would bring Wade's wine. The situation was thus changed so quickly that the bewildered man stood, struggling still with the confusion and burden of his thoughts. Antoinette watched him for a moment, then again touched his arm, reminding him of her presence.

'You are very foolish,' she said, 'very foolish.'

'I realize that.'

'Well, let us laugh about it. I think it is wise to laugh when you cannot understand, or when you are—afraid.'

He turned to her and took her hand in his.

'Is that true? Is it?' He spoke like a man drowning, crying to the shore.

'I don't know,' she whispered, returning the

pressure of his fingers. 'But it is good enough—if you are afraid—if you have suffered and dare not look forward.'

She looked up into his face, her own beautiful with compassion; her voice broken and rough with feeling.

'Isn't it enough, Mr. Wade, that you have come to a new country and have found a few people who would wish to value you at more than your own price? My brother Charles told me of that meeting on the road from Boulogne. I knew he was strangely interested—and I have been wondering about that because such interests are unusual with him. He is very—very old and civilized, very French, Mr. Wade. Such people are cautious; they do not give themselves easily. You can understand, therefore, that I was intrigued; that I wanted to meet you. And I found then that——'

He stooped, looking closely at her, his spirit hungering for the balm she was offering.

'What did you find?'

'I found that you, too, were very old, very civilized. Come now, Mr. Wade, you are foolish. Look, you are trembling again. You have been ill—for how long? Years, perhaps—maybe since the war? Was that it? You may care to tell me one day; but not now, my friend—Mr. Wade, come along, you are starving, and I must introduce you to Madame Mattay's cabbage soup.'

She led him by the hand from the studio, locked the door, and walked beside him through the

orchard, her arm lightly in his. As they passed under the yew archway she paused in the shadow, detaining him for a moment to listen to the laughter coming from the house.

'You can hear that the world goes on,' she said. 'You may as well travel with it. I think that is good statecraft, eh? Both my brothers have learned that—to care for nothing, to be afraid of nothing.'

For the first time he looked at her with amusement.

'That's what Mrs. Gould advised, too.'

She dropped his arm suddenly and walked on, then said over her shoulder: 'You are not so civilized after all.'

## CHAPTER XXI

### SIGNS OF AWAKENING

A MOMENT later Charles came from the house, carefully carrying a glass of wine in each hand. As the sunlight fell upon him, he appeared to be holding two lamps of golden fire that danced to the rhythm of his solemn pace as he felt his way over the uneven bricks. He met Wade and Antoinette beneath a huge pear tree, from which the frost-loosened leaves were silently falling.

'Monsieur, the cup of the future; the cup

of forgetfulness,' he said with mock ceremony, facing Wade and holding out a glass at arm's length.

Entering into the mood of this playful ritual, Wade took the glass and held it aloft.

'The cup of forgetfulness; and to the death of conscience.'

At this last unexpected word, twisted out of Antoinette's good counsel, she looked sharply at him, but seeing laughter in his eyes, she smiled also, and put out her hand.

'This is to be a ceremony,' she said, 'so I must share it with you.'

'Well, first,' said Charles, raising his glass—'no, secondly—we have had the first toast! Secondly, here is to a very pleasant triangle. May it remain equilateral!'

He handed the glass to Antoinette, she put out her other hand to Wade and took his glass. Standing with the two glasses against her breast, she looked first at her brother and then at her guest; then, very seriously, her lovely head bent, she drank from each glass and passed them back.

As she did so a leaf from the pear tree alighted on the bubbled surface of the wine in Wade's glass. In order to avoid it he turned the stem in his fingers, so that his lips touched the rim where Antoinette's had wetted it. He closed his eyes, paused, and drank.

He looked up to find Antoinette staring at the empty glass; her cheeks were flushed, and she

avoided his eyes when he looked pointedly at her and said: 'The potion works.'

'Yes,' said Charles wryly, 'even Nature seems to have taken part in the ceremony. Possibly a good omen,' and with that characteristic over-lifting glance from under drooping lids he looked at the leaf clinging to the bottom of the glass.

Without further comment on this little game of symbolism they joined the rest of the party in the house.

Ten minutes later they all set off down the hill across the green slope that led to the road and the Hôtel St. Hilaire. In the open courtyard before the little inn they found the lunch-table laid, with benches to sit on. The angle of the house and the stables caught the noonday sun, and was warm with hay-smell and the summer-dry tang of dust. A belated giant sunflower, blowsy and bedraggled, still bloomed beside the stable door. Below it two children sat playing with marbles on a solitaire board. A mule in the stable stood with his head over the half-door, watching them sagaciously, flicking his ears at the few drowsy flies that still survived to plague him. The landlord, Monsieur Mattay, wearing a grey, sleeveless jersey, sat at the table beside the inn door, a carafe of red wine and a packet of Caporals beside him. He was patching the bellows of an accordion, the delicate task requiring much adjustment of vision from behind the cigarette smoke that filtered up through the huge moustache.

As the party approached, he put down the instrument and came to meet them, shaking hands all round, and immediately plunging into the continuation of a serial joke with Charles, chuckling and hoisting up his trousers. He then led the way to the table and invited the ladies to go indoors, *la patronne* being in the kitchen. She appeared in the doorway, however, while he was speaking.

'Ah, mon Dieu!' she cried, raising two small hands to heaven and rolling her eyes in their fat-bolstered sockets. A moment later her arms were round Hilaire's neck, and he submitted to a kiss as loud as the smack of a wet teacloth. This was repeated with Charles and Antoinette, the others being offered a small hand to shake.

After these salutations she stripped off a flowered overall and threw it over her husband's arm. She then preened herself and patted her huge corsage into position, talking and laughing the while, her beady black eyes flashing with mischief.

'Robert, Robert!' she cried to one of the children, 'go and tell Jacqueline. Where is the girl? Jacqueline, Jacqueline!'

A strange figure emerged from the stable, hay fork in hand, wearing a tatter-brimmed straw hat, a varied collection of skirts, woollen coats, pinafores, with a sack pinned lengthwise round her upholstered hips. Her legs were bare, and she clip-clopped over the stones in *sabots*.

'What is it?' she asked sulkily. 'Oh, they've come.' And she returned, laid the hayfork against

the stable wall, and took off the sacking apron. 'I 'll fetch the soup.'

Monsieur Mattay meanwhile had vanished into the house, reappearing with a magnum of red wine, which he placed ceremoniously in the centre of the table with a self-satisfied 'Bien!'

Then Jacqueline brought out the soup, drooping under the weight of the tureen. Madame clucked with pleasure and pride, and as soon as everybody was seated, she seized a ladle and filled the bowls, which she passed round the table, leaning over with a hand on Hilaire's shoulder. Throughout the operation she kept up a running fire of badinage with him and Charles, asking them whether they were married yet, whether they were true to her, lamenting the marital shortcomings of *Monsieur le Patron*, the iniquities of the government, the price of veal, and all the other innumerable disadvantages of life.

When all were served, she poured out half a glass of wine and emptied it into Hilaire's soup, saying: 'You like it so, eh?' and smiling as he nodded approval. Monsieur Mattay stood a few paces off, lighted a cigarette from his huge brass machine, raised his cap, benignly murmured 'Bon appétit,' and disappeared into the house. A moment later, madame, after a last survey of the table, followed him, and the guests were left to devote themselves to the great bowls of soup, and to speculate upon its rich ingredients. The children had crept shyly away, leaving only the mule as spectator and auditor.

One or two customers from the fields or the canal, passing the table on their way, touched their caps and wished 'bon appétit,' and at each salute Hilaire raised his glass, greeted the passer-by, and then settled himself comfortably into his napkin.

The meal continued for an hour, madame and Jacqueline carrying the courses to an accompaniment of laughter and chatter. The food, the wine, the sunshine, and the ineffable peacefulness and silence in which the feast was set, encouraged Wade to keep his mood of half-fantastic resolution. He sat next to Josephine, with Antoinette at the head of the table, Hilaire and Miriam opposite, and Charles at the bottom. No shadows clouded the pleasant intercourse. Josephine, lazily incoherent with the wine, played at gallantry with Charles, leaving Wade to Antoinette. He, too, was somewhat dizzy, but this only confirmed his mood of confidence and gratitude, and he talked with her, forgetful of his fears and the restraints of his sick spirit.

After lunch they walked along the canal for an hour, dawdling under the poplars, watching the rats plunging among the wild iris blades, now brittle and sere. The sun dropped down the sky, and the light mellowed into deeper shades of dusty gold, throwing soft-edged shadows over the canal, and touching every moving thing with an overtone of poetry: cattle, birds' wings, peasants, and the fields below the banks, barges crimping through the placid water, breaking its oil-stained patterns oozing from the rotting leaves, shattering them into

a sparkle of dancing medallions that gradually dissolved again into the smooth surface, to re-compose new shapes from the decaying vegetation.

Strolling, with laughter and talk, carelessly drifting from one to the other, the three men and three women abandoned themselves to the timelessness of that belated autumn afternoon. No past, no future, surrounded that temporary eternity; the sun shone warm and golden, the leaves hung motionless, the gnat-swarms pulsed up and down in their transparent dance upon the almost visible air. Little wisps of mist lay coiled in the lower fields. Nothing discordant, nothing to disturb the mood of forgetfulness.

Wade listened to the discussions between the de Vaudracs about their intention to convert the cottage into a hotel. Would they ever do it, he wondered; were they the sort of people who extricated themselves from imaginary financial straits by organizing still more imaginary plans of campaign? He half believed it. He suspected that this charming girl, in spite of her matter-of-fact character, was only practically practical, and not equipped with that more speculative and political realism which enables a person to attack modern society and wring wealth out of it. Perhaps she belonged to the past; to the eighteenth century; quick, literal-minded, intensely civilized.

He laughed at himself as he contemplated these absurd generalizations about a creature so vivid, so utterly simple, yet so inscrutable in her self-

possession. Could she ever make a mistake; commit herself to a false step? He doubted that. He was prepared to let go his recently acquired caution and cynicism. He was attracted to brother and sister. They looked at him with a recognition in their eyes. Why was that? It half disturbed him, because he, too, had the same feeling towards them. Perhaps he was still slightly deranged. What ideas, sympathies, interests, could he have in common with these two? But he knew these questions were a sham. He had to confess to himself that a new influence was acting upon him, making him once more vulnerable to those forces which can behave so treacherously, filling the heart and spirit as rain fattens buds, stems, and roots; then suddenly freezing and destroying what it had nurtured.

He tried to warn himself now, but it was impossible. The pleasure outweighed the fear. Merely to feel even this slight revival of interest, of mental and emotional warmth, enlarged him with wonder and gratitude. He walked between the brother and sister, playing with these happy thoughts, content to be silent, to listen, without hearing, to Hilaire, Miriam, and Josephine who walked in front, arm in arm, three impressive, well-dressed figures. They seemed not to belong to this scene, this moment.

At last the sun sank, and the little eternity vanished with it. Time-shudders disturbed the air, broke the rhythm of the gnat-dance, and the

pattern of these mortals' idleness. Josephine shivered.

'What do we do now?' she asked, stopping and turning round to Antoinette.

'We shall go to the Farthings across the fields. Dinner is early there. I told them we should come towards dusk. Shall we go now, Charles?'

They turned off from the canal-side and made their way along a path between the sedgy fields, where water-fowl were clucking. The procession moved in single file, Charles leading the way. Nobody spoke. The mood of delight had sunk with the sun, and their minds were shadowed by chilly foreboding. Josephine again complained of the cold, but nobody replied. A little frown had settled over Miriam's serene face. Wade was expectant. He turned once and began to speak to her, but she nodded understandingly before he found words, and he had nothing to say. He tried to smile, and she nodded again, giving him a further glance of inquiry, and saying: 'You are tired; a little? But you have enjoyed to-day?'

'Yes. Aren't we rather a big crowd to descend upon the great man—if he is such an invalid?'

'Never mind. He likes to have people.'

'Will—young Farthing be there?'

She was startled, and looked up quickly.

'Why? What makes you think——?'

'Well, he disappeared from Paris. It occurred to me that he might have gone back to his people.'

She seemed unwilling to discuss this possibility,

and said no more while they crossed the fields, and passed alongside the orchard where father and son had been sitting a few days earlier.

All six stood in a close group while Antoinette rang the bell. Its clangour startled them, and Josephine looked at Antoinette almost angrily. Marie came from the kitchen, opened the gate, and blinked at the visitors from eyelids swollen and red with weeping.

'Ah, chérie,' she said, trying to smile. 'You have come, then? Come in, come in, mesdames, messieurs. I will tell her. He is not so well to-day. He is unhappy because Lincoln has gone.'

It was Antoinette who was startled. She seized Marie by the arm.

'What? Has he been *here*, then? We had not expected that. And what have they said to him? Have they been told that he had left his post? Oh, Hilaire, and they hoped—they believed he was settling down there so well. What *is* to be done?'

'Be quiet, child,' said Hilaire fiercely. 'Let us wait a little. No doubt——'

But he was interrupted by the appearance of Fräulein Spaeth. Wade was introduced, and he listened to her guttural French and studied her guardedly, uncomfortable because of her unlike likeness to her son. Making conventional conversation with this woman who was trying to conceal the fact that she was ill at ease, he actively compared his recollections of the son with this gaunt figure,

and he decided that the resemblance lay in the colour and texture of hair and freckled skin, and in the prominent eyes that seemed to have a fixed expression of distrust and petulance. He disliked her as he had disliked her son, realizing how unjust his prejudice might be. He could pity them both—God knows, he thought, we have much in common—poor devils! They are so obviously disgruntled with life, poisonously sorry for themselves and for their own self-sought failures.

She left the men in a small library across the courtyard, and took the ladies into her own room.

'What has happened?' Wade asked. 'The household seems to be terrified. Ought we to stay?'

'Yes, stay,' said Charles, while Hilaire shrugged his shoulders. 'You understand, Gregory, that Antoinette is a very close friend of Julius Farthing. She has been a favourite of his since she was a child. He is a simple old man—a genius, eh, Hilaire? An infant in his emotions. He has hoped for so much from Lincoln, and gradually the fool is breaking his heart—killing him—yes, killing him!'

'Don't *talk* so much, imbecile!' said Hilaire, turning on him suddenly. His nervous distress at being landed in the midst of a family upheaval was almost comic, and Charles looked at Wade, and from Wade to Hilaire, with an air of patient resignation.

'Don't *walk* so much, Hilaire,' he said. The other, who had been pacing up and down the room,

stopped, snorted, took out a cigar case, selected a cigar, and cut it.

'My God!' he said, 'you drive me mad. The whole place is mad!' He glared at Wade. 'Can you put up with it? What do you think, eh? You're a sane man, Mr. Wade. You have some sort of restraint at least. What do you make of all this—this temperament? Yes, temperament. They wear their hearts on their sleeves. They come and go, and break off their responsibilities—' His voice rose and cracked, and his big de Vaudrac eyes flashed fire—'I tell you, Mr. Wade, that nothing good will come of this. And you, Charles, sitting there, cowering and shivering like an—an ape—what have you to say?'

'Nothing,' said Charles, shutting his eyes and settling in his chair as though for a nap.

'Nothing! Nothing!' Hilaire's voice broke upon this obstacle and he could no longer articulate. He shook his head hopelessly at the imperturbable younger brother, who now spoke again.

'Hilaire, you will die of apoplexy one day, and all because your egg has been boiled hard. Why let yourself be so——' But at this moment Marie stepped into the courtyard and rang a hand-bell, summoning them to dinner. Hilaire's choler immediately subsided. His face resumed its normal brick-red, and with a beatific look toward Wade, he murmured: 'Ah!' and led the way across the court to the studio.

There they found the four ladies talking to

Julius Farthing. Antoinette, who was sitting on a stool at his feet, with her head against his knee, rose and brought Wade forward to be introduced. He followed her shyly, unable to see the sick man, for darkness had nearly fallen. But as he approached the invalid - chair Fräulein Spaeth switched on the electric light, which revealed the crippled figure too painfully. The light striking down emphasized the cheek-bones and the high-bridged nose, leaving the fleshless mouth and half-exposed teeth in shadow. A weak, breath-seeking voice welcomed the stranger, and with a mechanical effort the old man raised his eyes. Wade was conscious of fear. The eyes were those of a child, of a young girl, grey, innocent, trustful. He wanted to protest against something; the general cruelty of the universe, the insane grouping of circumstances, the tricks of fate and the haphazard, indifferent ordering of human lives by whatever power might be accused of such irresponsibility.

Wade bowed, not daring to touch the fragile hand raised in salute a few inches above the arm-rest of the chair. He murmured something only half coherent, and Julius Farthing smiled. 'Antoinette tells me you are masquerading under false colours, Mr. Wade; posing as a financial secretary to my countryman William Fletcher, while you are really a man who makes things; solid things. Isn't that so, eh? But Fletcher is a good fellow, don't you find? Does that sound patronizing, Miriam?' A charming smile lit the masked

features and he turned his head towards Miss Fletcher, who was standing with her sister beside the stove. 'He has been a good friend to me, in the days before people wanted to buy my work. Now that they want to I can't supply them fast enough. Absurd, isn't it?' The smile again trembled over his face, like a fleck of sunshine over a frozen mountain-lake.

'Well, shall we take our seats?' said his wife, wheeling him to the head of the table. 'You will be able to eat to-night, Julius; hein?'

Wade was still more ashamed of his initial disliking for her. Grim, tragic, resentful of what life had offered her, she yet displayed a complete and selfless devotion to this man for whom she had sacrificed her ambitions, her proud theories, and her social position. Perhaps this was why she had clung to the external signs of domination with added fanaticism, knowing how love and passion had betrayed her. It was these signs that her son had read when he was too young to see deeper; and by them he had been misdirected.

Wade looked at her from time to time during the meal, and his nervousness acted as an additional intelligence, instructing him in the miseries and anxieties of this woman. Every time she served her husband, or glanced at him as he fumbled with his food, Wade intercepted the fear in her eyes, and reflected it in his own. His mood of resolution, fostered by the companionship of the day, was beset by doubts. The old paralysing distrust

of fate, time, life, and of humanity towards humanity began to chill his mind.

He tried, however, to disguise these feelings, and to aid the other guests in their effort to appear oblivious of anything untoward in the affairs of the house. Encouraged by the presence of Antoinette and Charles to remind him of the confidence won earlier in the day, he might have succeeded, had not events conspired to prevent him.

During a lull in the table-talk, the gate-bell rang. Its loud peal caused everybody to look up, and thus none of the guests failed to see the glances of hope and fear that passed between host and hostess. Before conversation could begin again, Marie entered, visibly distressed. Begging pardon, she leant down and whispered in Fräulein Spaeth's ear. But Julius Farthing could not suppress his anxiety.

'What is it, Marie?' he said. 'Has he come home?'

Marie looked at him with tears in her eyes.

'No, no! It is only the parcel——' Then she stopped and appealed helplessly to her mistress, who sat like a statue.

'The parcel? Good—then I can get on to-morrow. Have you paid the man?'

'No; that is the trouble. I have not——'

'Not enough money? Why, how much is it?'

Fräulein Spaeth spoke before Marie could reply.

'No, Julius. She has not enough money because Lincoln has borrowed the housekeeping purse, and most of Marie's own savings.'

She was torturing herself, and torturing the man she loved; jealousy, perverted pride, and heaven knows what other irrational forces goading her on. She seemed to have forgotten that other people were present. Her eyes, wild with fanaticism, were staring at the culprit's father. Wade tried not to look. He was horrified by the change in this unaccountable woman. Poor devil, he thought, remembering the sudden emotional storm that had racked Lincoln Farthing during that scene with the de Vaudracs in the bedroom in Paris. No wonder! No wonder!

He saw cruelty, an abstract, unblameable force, closing in round the stricken old man, forcing the conclusion to a life-long campaign against his innocent happiness, his child-like joy in life. Perhaps it was these very qualities which had roused the enmity of fate.

Hilaire was the first to break silence. He had been sitting with his head sunk in his shoulders, his face dark and sullen. Suddenly, with a little grimace, he looked up, took out his wallet, and handed a fifty-franc note to Marie.

'Well, don't keep the fellow waiting. Pay with this now and we'll arrange matters later.'

It was done so quickly and quietly that nobody had time to protest. Marie took the money and was gone before Julius Farthing could speak, and even when he did find words, they did not refer to Hilaire's action.

'Minna,' he said, 'why did you say that? It is

only a little matter. He will clear it up. We don't know how urgent the need may have been. Perhaps——'

'There is no perhaps. He has gone off to Marseilles without a word to us, except the note he left behind. And *that* was no explanation. Well, it cannot be helped. Let us say no more.'

She turned to Hilaire. 'Thank you, Hilaire. I will get the money from my room after dinner.'

Wade tried to eat, but he could not stop the throbbing of his pulse, or the racing of blood in his temples. All effort, all resolution to drag himself out of the slough of despair seemed now so futile. He was beaten down again by this sense of loss and cheat. The spirit, the world of the spirit and all its youth-illusions, was only a fantasy. Here was the fact, the substance, out of which one had to build one's beliefs—or disbeliefs; a negative existence proceeding downwards from the absolute of matter into the unknown, the inane, the darkness.

He was sure of one thing only, the distress of his companions, and their unspoken and ill-concealed solicitude for Julius Farthing. Miriam was a ghost, her face pale and spectre-thin, her wide eyes haunted as she tried to avoid seeing the results of her protégé's irresponsible folly. Wade noticed that Hilaire was watching her heavily, sharing and resenting her distress. Charles, too, was avoiding the scene. Though he sat at the table between Miriam and Josephine, he was already fled. He did not look up from his plate—or so it appeared.

Not even the nervously watchful Wade saw the underglance from the downcast eyes, with which this enigmatic fellow studied Julius at the head of the table, observing the battle waging there between the old man's realism and his obstinate belief in the normality of his son.

Only Josephine and Antoinette, from their respective points of view, were undisturbed. Neither, perhaps, was surprised by the revelation of Lincoln's latest escapade. Both realized the danger for Julius of allowing it to be magnified by emotional comment. Josephine may have been callous. She continued her meal as though nothing had happened, asking Wade to fill her glass and rallying him because his own was empty. From that moment she seemed to select him for her attentions, having ignored him all day.

For some minutes the polite pretence was kept up, everybody trying to resume the meal and to take up the threads of conversation. Again they might have succeeded, but suddenly Antoinette jumped up, with a little throat-cry of alarm, to catch Julius Farthing in her arms as he fell forward over the table.

'Quick, Hilaire, Charles,' she cried without looking round. 'He has fainted. It is another attack.'

Poor Fräulein Spaeth was now helping her, and between them, with Hilaire and Charles, they lifted him from the chair and laid him on the bed, and gently straightened the rigid limbs. His wife

stood stricken to a silent madness, staring down at him through her wild eyes, moving her lips, and making unintelligible signs with her hands.

Antoinette, sitting on the bed and chafing his temples with eau-de-Cologne, called out quietly, between her tender endearments to the unconscious man, for Hilaire to telephone for the doctor. Marie had now appeared and burst into tears, throwing her apron over her head. Charles tried to console her, and led her away, his arm round her shoulders.

Wade, ignored by everybody, fled to the courtyard, where he stood shivering, trying to think of something useful to do. He was half-paralysed with fear, but by an effort he banished the weakness and went off down to the inn, to find Wilson and the car, and to bring them up to the house with Monsieur Mattay.

Half an hour later the doctor arrived from Nemours and examined Julius Farthing, who was still unconscious. Fräulein Spaeth, Hilaire, and Antoinette remained in the studio, from which the others had removed the remains of the dinner. For Marie was sitting helpless in the kitchen, moaning and crying, invoking the runaway Lincoln with affectionate lamentations. Not until she saw Josephine and Miriam preparing to wash the dishes did she succeed in controlling her fears. With cries of protest mingled with sobs, she snatched away the apron which Miriam was about to put on.

'No, no!' she cried. 'Impossible, impossible!' Finally, all three worked together, while Charles

and Wade stood outside the library door, smoking cigarettes, talking in undertones, and furtively watching the shadows on the curtains of the studio.

'Have you found,' said Charles, half to himself, 'that at times like this you are possessed by a ghoulish anxiety, a desire for the worst to happen; and are ready to be disappointed if it doesn't?'

Wade looked at him, wondering at this ability for detached self-examination at such a time.

'Yes,' he said. 'It was a common enough feeling during the war. That memory has just come back to me. For a moment I thought—but no, you are right; everybody feels it. I remember that during a bombardment, when the din was like hell itself, one wanted to urge it on—louder, louder!'

He broke off with a nervous laugh, and shivered again. They both retreated into the library, and Charles kindled the fire of pine cones, laid in the open hearth.

'I was too young for all that,' he said, staring into the little flames.

'So were we, who were in it,' said Wade. 'People say it made us prematurely old. But I'm inclined to think it made us afraid to grow old. Yes, yes! It made us afraid to go on living. It stopped us. We dared not face any more experience. We stopped there. I know one of the poets of the war, and a few months ago he said to me: "You know, Wade, the trouble is that I'm still living in 1916." Well, that's true of us all, Charles—true of us all.'

He could not keep his mind concentrated on the discussion and its significance. His hands were trembling and his voice rose shrilly on the wave of hysteria that drowned the path of thought. He found himself confessing as though hypnotized: 'I'm afraid to go on, that's what it is, something broken. It is all right as long as things run smoothly. But the least opposition—the least setback—and I'm finished.' He hung over the last word, and repeated it on such a note of despair that Charles turned from the fire and laid a hand shyly on his knee.

At this touch, so much more understanding than speech, Wade shrank back, afraid of the sympathy he had aroused in this younger man. He was afraid also of his own response to it. The weakness must be crushed. There must be no chances for treachery and disappointment. 'I am sorry,' he said sadly. 'I'm talking too much.'

But Charles was not offended. He nodded, smiled to himself, and murmured something which would have become audible had not Antoinette entered to attract the attention of both men.

She showed no surprise at seeing her brother sitting at Wade's feet. 'We have sent to Paris for a specialist,' she said, addressing them both, 'though, apparently, not much can be done. It is another stroke—and that is all we know.' She wiped her lips with her handkerchief, and turned aside, repeating: 'Yes, we can do nothing—but wait.'

‘Will he come to-night?’ asked Charles, his voice small with fear.

‘Yes. He will be on his way now. I shall stay, and Miriam. We *must* stay. Minna cannot be left to—to face it alone.’

‘Of course,’ said Wade. He would not look at her. He dared not. Why had she brought him into this? It was unfair, cruel. What right had she to be so calm, so ready to face the horror about to fall over this house? She asked too much—no, she asked nothing. That was the cruelty. She made no demand, standing there so simply and looking to him with those eloquent eyes.

‘I think there are too many of us,’ he began. He must get away before he lost his nerve completely. ‘You see——’ he went on, prepared to be lucid, to explain with a mad preciseness exactly how impossible it was that he could face this horror.

‘Yes, Gregory,’ she said, lingering on his name as though she were grateful. ‘Will you go back with Charles and the others?’

He wished she would understand how indifferent he was. Why did she speak to him, look at him thus, thanking him, taking so much for granted? He was almost insane with fear, and in that moment of panic he suddenly recollected, with a spasm of vague but universal hatred, the words which Lincoln Farthing had last spoken to her, referring to that *complaisant* occasion. Wade realized that he, too, had been shocked and outraged by the word. It had shaken him, thrown him back into the gulf.

He must warn her; he must make them both understand how impossible it was for him ever again to give, to trust, to cherish. He looked from one to the other: Charles sitting on the ground, head in hand, staring into the fire, his eyes reflecting the flames and shaping them to melancholy; Antoinette standing with her hand on the back of the chair, waiting, her beauty draped with compassion. In this light, and with their hearts charged with the same anxiety, brother and sister looked almost exactly alike. Their gentleness, their candour and ease—but Wade dared not speculate further. With a ruthlessness that tore into his own mind like a suicide's knife he forced himself to break the spell which time and circumstance had combined to weave round him and them.

'Your singular friend, Lincoln Farthing, has much to answer for,' he said, turning his head to direct the remark pointedly at Antoinette. The words seemed to hang in the air, as though it were reluctant to deliver them to her ears. She received them robbed of their evil, for her response was to draw nearer and sit on the arm of the chair.

Wade at once suspected that she was acting, trying to ignore what he had meant. Some inner voice cried out to him from a lost world, bidding him to turn to her, to bury his head in her lap, to be lost in the fragrance of that gently rising and falling breast. Why did she not cry out against him? Why did not her brother fly at him as he had flung himself against that mad fool Lincoln Farthing?

'Yes,' said Antoinette at last, shaking her head sadly, 'he has much to answer for, poor Lincoln. It is not as though one could blame him—that is what makes it all so hopeless.'

'All? All? What do you mean by all?'

Wade jumped up and almost shouted the question. There was now no possibility of mistaking her meaning. Antoinette seemed to cower, while Charles turned to face them, rising slowly to his feet.

'Why, Gregory—I don't know what I do mean,' she said, and she was about to add something more, had she not suddenly dropped her head on to the arm lying along the back of the chair.

Both men stared at the trembling shoulders. Wade, feeling death in his heart, tried to speak to Charles, but where was nothing to say. The unendurable moments passed, until Charles approached and touched his sister's hand.

'Come, Toni,' he said. 'We others will get back to Paris.'

Antoinette rose, stood with her back to them for a few moments, trying to control her tears. Then she turned and shook hands with Wade.

'Good-bye,' she said, 'I must go back to them. Forgive me.'

But he would not allow himself to reply. He knew he had hurt her and he was glad; so glad that he forgot to be on his guard against this ensnaring pleasure. He could not see that he was savagely jealous, and therefore once again a living man.

## CHAPTER XXII

## NEW BODY

As the next few days passed, Wade began to be conscious of a new sense of physical health. He had not much time to think about it, for Mr. Fletcher kept him hard at work. Miriam's absence also brought him further duties, more personal tasks which she usually undertook for her father. Many of these commissions Wade received direct from her when she rang up to deliver the daily bulletin. Speaking to her on the second morning, Wade immediately detected her distress.

'Are things worse to-day?' he asked, as soon as he recognized her voice.

'It is bad news, I'm afraid. He regained consciousness during the night—but the paralysis has advanced.'

Mr. Fletcher interrupted.

'What does she say, Mr. Wade? Tell me, what is the news? Poor fellow; I wish——'

'One moment, sir. Yes, Miss Fletcher, I can hear. What? Oh, I see. I'm afraid so. Yes, I'll tell him. Is that absolutely final? No hope at all?'

He looked up, to find Mr. Fletcher watching him. He wanted to say so much. He wanted to cry out against this inevitable, monstrous fact. He wanted to tell her what he felt, to offer to do

something. He wanted to ask what Antoinette thought about it; how it had affected her.

But he was dumb. He could not even offer the conventional remarks about being deeply distressed, and so on. A wicked, perverse sense of new life throbbed in his limbs. The hand that gripped the telephone was strong and eager again. He was hungry, he wanted to walk, to climb, to look up into the sun and shout aloud. He was rejoicing in his cruelty. He had hurt Antoinette, and he wanted to triumph over her simplicity and contrition. He was bewildered by it all, and yet he rejoiced in the confusion. Hunger, new interests of ear and eye, these signs of life invigorated the perversity and cynicism that were the fruits of the deadly weariness of spirit and blood which had frozen his life during the past five years.

'Come, Mr. Wade, what is it? Tell me. You are sitting there like a sphinx. Here, give me the telephone!'

And for the first time Wade saw Mr. Fletcher speaking at the instrument he so fantastically abhorred.

'Miriam? Yes, your father speaking. No; I don't, but Wade seems to be frozen alive. He's sitting there, yes, still there, but I could get nothing out of him. What? Oh, Miriam, what is that? No, no! Too terrible! His right arm now? And hand? Which means that he'll do no more work! But dear God, that is all he lives for. Does he know? What? He can't speak?'

The old gentleman lowered the receiver, holding it like a mace, while he tried to assimilate the news! His parchment skin seemed even more mummified—he stared at nothingness with fear-haunted eyes. ‘Poor Farthing,’ he breathed, from time to time.

Wade could hear a tiny voice speaking, and gently he took the instrument from Mr. Fletcher’s hand.

‘Is that you, Miss Fletcher? Yes, Wade. Your father is very upset. Is there nothing we can do here? No, we’ve heard nothing of Lincoln Farthing. Nobody knows his address? Well, he is bound to write in a day or two. Or perhaps he’ll turn up in Paris again. Try to find him? Certainly—though what about his mother; will she ever forgive him now? You think so?’

He was still trying to compel himself to show some solicitude.

‘Will you tell Mademoiselle de Vaudrac that——’ but he was speaking to a void. Miriam had rung off, or been cut off. What had he begun to say? He was not sure—he was talking at random—anything—anything—it did not matter.

He looked up to find that Mr. Fletcher had left the room. Perhaps it would be wise to find out where he was. The news had obviously upset him badly, and already he was in a very nervous state, worrying about the coming crash in New York, working himself to death reorganizing the distribution and security of his wealth. God, what a life! What a sudden maelstrom after the first few

weeks of dreamlike idleness! But now, Wade told himself, he felt capable of meeting any amount of excitement and work. What was it; how had the change come? So far from being indifferent, he was—— but the telephone again!

'Oh, Mrs. Gould! Yes, Wade speaking. Your sister has just rung up. Yes, you have heard the news? She wants us to find Lincoln Farthing and send him home. I don't see—what's that?—No, but what use is it if the mother is so incensed against him? For the father's sake? Yes; but the poor old man cannot speak or use his right arm. What does one think? I can't, no, I can't. It is impossible to realize what it means. Your father is terribly shocked. He has just this moment left the room after hearing the news. Yes, I will. But I can't come now; I must find out where he is, and what he wants to do to-day. He has been working furiously since we got back last Sunday. Thank you, yes. I'll come to-night.'

He darted out of the library, to find Mr. Fletcher pacing up and down the hall, his hands clasped behind him and his head hanging forward. The old man was muttering to himself, his thin, querulous pipings quite unintelligible.

'Mr. Fletcher, they want us to find Lincoln Farthing and send him home.'

It was becoming an obsession. Find Lincoln Farthing and send him to Antoinette. Force them to meet again; let them face each other and put the Devil to shame. What did that mean? What

was the matter? His mind seemed to be wandering as though he were drunk. Perhaps he was. Something had crept into his blood. A new brutal virus of elementary life. Life; not sleep; not death!

With new courage he took Mr. Fletcher by the arm, walked up and down with him, urging him to be calm, making one suggestion after another to distract him; and to his own amazement, he succeeded. Still astonished that he had been able to impose his will upon anybody—and especially upon this obliquely dominating individual—Wade led his employer back to the library and got him into the arm-chair. He then rang and asked Jacques to bring two brandies.

Still encouraged by this new strength, he pleaded with Mr. Fletcher to do no more work that afternoon.

'I'll go and see the brothers,' he said, 'Try to get them together and see what can be done. We've got to find that fellow somehow, if only for his own sake.'

Mr. Fletcher agreed without demur, and after lunch Wade went off to meet Hilaire and Charles at a rendezvous arranged over the telephone. He had seen neither of them since the drive home last Sunday. Walking through the streets now, swinging his limbs and breathing the air, he recalled the details of that journey; the speed, the sense of disaster, and the intimations of new life. He had sat with Josephine, his clothes touching hers.

Hilaire had done most of the talking, with sudden lapses into a strained and suspicious silence. Charles had appeared to be almost asleep, except for occasional remarks that showed he had heard the arguments, and was conscious of all the under-currents of feeling.

Wade found Charles sitting huddled in a great-coat, sheltering from the wind in a screened corner outside *Les Deux Magots*, opposite the church of *St. Germain-des-Prés*. His lack-lustre eyes lit up when he saw Wade, and he raised aloft a yellow-back to attract the Englishman's attention. He was still suffering from a cold caught during the ride home after the nervous strain of the experience at the Farthings' home. He was almost enjoying the dramatic possibilities of the black melancholy that possessed him.

Wade found it impossible to interest him in the project of finding Lincoln Farthing, and therefore gave up the attempt until Hilaire should come with reinforcements. For a quarter of an hour the two friends sat almost in silence, each embarrassed by the revelation of unexpected qualities in the other. In addition, Wade saw Antoinette in her brother's face, and this made him afraid of giving himself away. He began to dread the idea of discussing Lincoln Farthing, for he was sure that Charles knew that he knew. The suspicion became a certainty. He saw it corroborated by the defensiveness in Charles's eyes. And how did the brother relate him to this little bit of family history?

The answer was shelved, for Hilaire appeared, jumping off a tram as it slowed up at the terminus outside the café. He took no notice of his brother, except to pick up Charles's novel, glance at the title, and hand it back.

'So,' he said, shaking his head lugubriously. 'This is what we have expected. Sooner or later that tragic fool must precipitate disaster. This is Miriam's reward, poor girl, for all her efforts. Eh, Charles, and Toni's, too? What do you say?'

Charles shook his head, disclaiming any views on the matter. It was evident now that he was shocked and frightened, and was hiding behind his reputation for whimsicality. Wade, still waiting armed with his new vitality, half amazed by it, sat looking on, wondering whether Hilaire knew how much Charles loathed Lincoln Farthing.

All these niceties of contemplation, however, were banished by Hilaire's melodramatic suggestions as to ways and means. He began by suggesting detective agencies, and the commandeering of a high-speed car to rush backwards and forwards searching for clues to feed to the sleuth-hounds. Wade and Charles spent nearly an hour trying to subdue this incorrigible boyishness, and by the time a plan of action had been settled they found that they were hungry and that it was dinner-time. Accordingly, the committee adjourned to a little restaurant in the Rue St. Benoît behind Les Deux Magots, where they spent another hour eating and drinking and talking. The excellent

sweetbreads and *haricots verts*, with a very good *vin ordinaire*, induced Charles to take a more active part in the plan-making, and with his help—much scoffed at, but nevertheless accepted, by Hilaire—it was decided that Hilaire should go early next morning to Marseilles, and that Charles should return to La Genevraie, thus establishing the necessary outposts of the campaign.

The hour being now nearly nine o'clock, Hilaire was reminded that he had to run off, and without further ceremony he left the others, shouting as he went that he would ring up from Marseilles as soon as he reached his hotel.

The two friends, again alone together, walked up the Rue de Rennes, talking freely at last. Wade, too, was warmed by the wine and cognac.

'What is going to happen?' he said, taking Charles's arm. 'When we *do* find him? That's what puzzles me. I think——'

'Yes, I know what you think,' said Charles, suddenly throwing off the last of his defences. 'That Antoinette will be embarrassed, eh? But that is not so. Oh, no. She can command any situation, believe me. So why do you worry about that, eh, Gregory?'

Wade was temporarily nonplussed. 'Why should you tell me this?' he asked. 'Do you imagine——?'

'No, I imagine nothing,' replied Charles. 'But I can see what you think of Farthing. We sympathize there. And I can explain to you, Gregory,

that I do not appreciate him—or welcome any imposition on my sister.'

'You refer to the scene in my room?'

Charles nodded grimly, but a moment later he smiled.

'But, of course, we both exaggerate that—for reasons that we cannot explain?'

They looked at each other, wondering perhaps what they dared, or wanted, to confide. Only one certainty united them; and that was the establishment of this utterly unexpected mutual attraction from which neither could escape.

They parted at the Montparnasse 'métro' station, and Wade walked up the boulevard, his nerves tingling with an excitement such as he had not known for many years. The lights, the warm night, more like September than early winter, the traffic of humanity; he felt himself a sharer in all this, part of it, alive with it. And he was almost afraid.

He found the new block of studios at the top of the hill, a few turnings off the Rue Raspail. As he rang the bell of Mrs. Gould's apartment he asked himself for the first time what he was doing here, and where this would lead him. But he could find no answer. He was so far committed now to a return to activity—but the forces which might control that activity still slept.

During the next few moments he was aware only of this sense of drifting with the stream down a river suddenly tumultuous with waters from un-

known mountain heights. Mrs. Gould opened the door to him, and he observed that she was in a resplendent mood.

'Well,' she said, 'and I expected you to supper! This is a bad beginning, I guess!' But she smiled good-humouredly and ignored his apology, telling him he need not explain, as she had already heard why he had dined elsewhere. Seeing him puzzled by this, she laughed and flung open the door leading from the little vestibule into the studio. Sitting in the middle of the luxurious room before an electric stove, was Hilaire.

He rose as Wade entered, and looked from Josephine to the new-comer, shamefaced and malicious.

'And where is Charles?' he said, shaking hands with Wade as though they met for the first time that day.

'Oh, Charles?' Wade replied. 'I did not imagine——' and he grinned.

De Vaudrac flushed, turned to Josephine, looked at her angrily, then suddenly cocked his head with a sly glance at Wade. The situation immediately was lifted to a comic plane.

'My God, you're a shrewd customer,' thought Wade, wondering what lay behind those clever eyes. He almost suspected that de Vaudrac was grateful to him for offering an opportunity for escape from some too-pleasant sorcery. But it was obvious that he did not intend to retreat without defending his pride.

Mrs. Gould drew up another arm-chair and poured out coffee for Wade. He had never seen her so girlish and talkative—or so superb. The combination of splendour and simplicity, offered with such candour as a womanly tribute to these two men whom she admired, aroused them both to a curious conflict of emotions, which she played with skill.

Wade had no opportunity to look about the room. He was fully occupied by this friendly wrestling match with Hilaire for the willing prize. He noticed a perfect lighting scheme, which included a standard lamp beside the plain-wood Blüthner grand, where Josephine sat, talking to them over the music-desk, and offering them scatterings of jazz, Scriabin, and absurdly emotional fragments of songs remembered from her childhood in the Southern States.

Twelve o'clock struck while they were sitting before the stove discussing the Farthing family. Josephine was only vaguely interested, for she despised Lincoln, and had no taste for his father's work. She lay back in her chair, looking indolently from one to the other of the men, smiling at her own thoughts, and chipping Hilaire whenever he became heated—which was not infrequently. As the evening grew late, she seemed to become more intentionally provocative, and at last succeeded in making him angry. With his characteristic abruptness he suddenly turned on Wade and asked him whether he had thought any more about Miriam's

proposals for decorating the shop in the Boulevard des Italiens.

'Yes, I have,' said Wade, so loudly and with such emphasis that the others were startled. He, too, was surprised, and paused to watch the effect of his spontaneous lie. 'Yes; I have been thinking a lot about it, and now that I've had a chance to get my breath I feel that I should like to try my hand again. You realize that I've done nothing for some years, don't you? Somehow or other I've got out of the habit of——'

But he paused. Why should he acknowledge his weakness? Wasn't that a fool's game, which he had played too long? Lifting up his glass of wine he stared through it at the fire. 'I welcome a struggle,' he said, 'after sleeping so long.'

Then he realized that he was not musing alone. Josephine and Hilaire, drawn into his reverie, were leaning forward, fascinated by his irrelevant words, charmed by his naïve sincerity and trick of thinking aloud.

Rising to his feet, he stood over Hilaire and cried joyously: 'Yes, it's something to come to life again, de Vaudrac. Don't you see that? Why should we care a damn for our past—or our future?'

Josephine also rose, and put her hands on his shoulders. 'Well, I'm glad you think that way,' she said, and laughed, patting him until he put up his hands and took her by the wrists.

Hilaire, flushed and sleepy, nodded several times; then he too laughed, shook himself, and levered his

body out of the low chair. 'Well,' he said, 'I'm going, if *you* are not. I must be up early to-morrow to catch my train. Here's to your—your——'

'Successful search,' said Josephine, pulling herself away from Wade and turning to Hilaire. 'Find that dangerous infant somehow, Hilaire.'

'Why should you care?' he said.

'I don't,' she laughed; 'no, for me he's well lost. But I'm not the only pebble on the beach. Now, you, Hilaire. Your occupation would be gone if you hadn't to spend half your life finding jobs for that waster. And then there is——'

'Hold your tongue!' he cried. 'You're a—a devil, José, a devil. Victimizing the world. You suck it like an orange! Yes, that's how you live. I'm going. So leave us alone, do you understand? Leave us alone.' And turning to Wade he shook his fist at him: 'Take care, Wade, take care!'

Josephine and Wade looked at each other as his words echoed round their wilful minds. He had rushed from the room angrily banging the door behind him, and for some moments they listened to him grunting in the vestibule, struggling into his coat.

'I'll see him off,' said Josephine quietly; and Wade waited for her. He heard her rich-toned voice outside, and sulky grunts from Hilaire; then the latching of the door—and the shooting of the bolt.

At this last sound he turned round and faced the wall. He was trembling with a too obvious excitement, and wanted to control himself before she came in again.

She did not return immediately, however. He heard her go into another room; he heard the squeak of a wardrobe door.

'Who is she?' he asked himself. 'Who the devil is she?' But he knew that he did not care. She was everything symbolizing life—rich, full-blooded physical life, taking and giving without question, bound by no scruples, no memories, no compassion.

Ten minutes passed; a quarter of an hour. He heard the clock ticking; his heart beating. He stretched his arms and yawned like a cat. He was hungry. Not for food. No, not for food. He had starved for more than two years. He had gathered into himself, enclosing himself in sterile fear and distrust, denied himself even the company of women; a meaningless celibate, without purpose or faith in his asceticism. He had fixed his body and soul in a chastity of frozen emotion.

But once more he was angry. He had been stirred and awakened and his body ached with longing. Despite all his resolutions, new life was beating in his blood. He saw Lincoln Farthing lounging on the table in front of him, helpless and ineffectual and destructive, thumbing the beautiful fruit and too sick to take it; thumbing it and spoiling it.

The door opened and Josephine came in. She had changed her clothes, and now wore a silk dressing-gown. He could see her slippered feet below it.

'Well, Gregory,' she said, holding her hands to the fire and looking over her shoulder at him. 'He's gone on his fruitless errand!'

‘Fruitless?’

‘Yes; Miriam rang me up this evening to say that Farthing had come home again!’

‘But you let Hilaire go?’

‘Why not? I don’t want to spoil his pleasure. He’s enjoying this like fun. And he’ll work off some flesh—which will make him more presentable for Miriam!’

She laughed happily, and turned to him, holding out her arms from which the loose sleeves had fallen back.

‘Haven’t you spotted that, either? It’s Miriam he’s in love with, but he can’t see it. She’s too willing. And because she is waiting he won’t come.’

She put her hands on his shoulders again, and again he took her by the wrists. They stood for a moment thus, looking at each other, their eyes alight with laughter and reckless greed.

‘I guess Gregory Wade has come back to earth at last?’ she said, tightening the grip of her hands on his shoulders. He felt the muscles of her wrists move, and this subtlety, this hidden rhythm, destroyed the last reserve. The mocking self, the fastidious and disillusioned mind, was overthrown.

The new man, the hungry man, leaned forward and kissed Josephine on her open mouth. He took her into his arms, and was lost in her fragrance, her dark richness. The last thing he sensed, before falling asleep into the depths of this new body, was the low-throated laughter of the woman who lay beside him, exhausted in his regeneration.

### PART III. NEW SELF



## CHAPTER XXIII

### A FEATHER IN THE WIND

USUALLY when Lincoln Farthing set out on a journey—even if it was only round the corner to buy a packet of cigarettes or a new tie—he was inspired with a sense of pioneering. A new world lay before him again, and he had forgotten the old ones, with their ignominious ruin and defeat.

But the journey down to Marseilles was different. He could not shake off his humiliations. Antoinette, Miriam, his mother, they haunted him still, and obscured the prospects of triumphant adventures and magnificent recognitions which must surely await him at the end. His day-dreams, as he lay back in the second-class compartment, rolling his head restlessly against the antimacassar, were riddled with misgivings. He was not quite happy about the money in his pocket. It was mostly Marie's money; and he was very fond of Marie. She had nursed him during his infancy, and with her milk he had imbibed an element of her spirit that made him part of her. She had always spoiled him, and protected him in her blind instinctive way from the moral rigours of his mother's anxious theories.

And now he had persuaded Marie to lend him

her life-savings to go on a wild-goose chase. She had acquiesced so easily in his plan for setting up a garage in one of the Riviera towns. The conquest of so shrewd a woman had been almost alarmingly easy, and he was half afraid of his own powers of persuasion. He wondered what there was about him that made women give so readily. There were few exceptions; but notably that horrible woman Mrs. Gould. He knew that she despised him; but that was no matter, for what decent-minded fellow would want to have anything to do with such a loathsome, sensual cat?

He turned from the unpleasant idea, to contemplate his assets in the world of men. They were not so bright. Hilaire de Vaudrac, of course, was a generous fellow and had done a lot in the matter of finding jobs. Not very understanding; and perhaps not so much interested in helping Lincoln Farthing as in pleasing Miriam. As for Charles, well, he was a decent enough fellow if one could get beneath his conceit and sarcasm.

It was an unfortunate business, that scene with him in front of the Englishman. Cold-blooded fish that; a man who seemed always to bob up in unexpected places, poking his stupid nose in where he wasn't wanted. Well, one of these days he would get it badly damaged. What right had he to make one feel so small, merely by standing aside and saying nothing? He was quite capable of coming down with the de Vaudracs and finding father in this condition. Curse the fellow. Why

couldn't these foreigners stay in their own countries? France was saddled with too many of them.

All this vilification of other people, however, could not keep from Farthing the vision of his father's stricken body. He knew that he was partly responsible; but he tried not to acknowledge the fact. Writhing in his seat, and smoking too many cigarettes, he stared savagely and miserably at the passing countryside, conscious of exile, of defeat, of alienation from mankind. He was different from the rest; and there lay the cause of all his failures. For to-day he acknowledged failure. It shut out all the hopes, all the Napoleonic day-dreams with which he usually buoyed himself up when setting forth to new conquests.

He had no job. His father was lying crippled. He had quarrelled again with his mother. These were bad enough; but greater than these was the dreadful truth which had gradually been breaking upon his mind: the fact that even physically he was different from other men; that in the most vital way he was deficient.

As the train slowed up outside Marseilles, he was again obsessed by this appalling thought. He hid his face in his hands, and groaned so loudly that he attracted the notice of a dapper little man who was standing on the seat and reaching up to the rack for a suitcase and a portfolio.

'Pardon, monsieur?' he said politely, 'you are in pain?'

Farthing turned a tousled red head, with angry

eyes and protruding lip. 'What?' he snarled. 'No, no, thanks.'

The little man blinked behind his spectacles, murmured something, and fled with his luggage.

Lincoln pulled himself together, brushed his fingers through his hair, took down his hat and bag, and followed the solicitous stranger. He shambled down the platform, still shaking after his fit of passion. Hatred blinded him, and he bumped into people, pushing them aside without apology, drawing his hat down defiantly over his eyes. His resentment sought out the persons who he believed had most humiliated him; those who refused to recognize his claims to special consideration, or to warm him with praise. So vehement was his concentration that as he left the station yard he had the illusion of their physical presence; the rich, repulsively feminine Mrs. Gould; little Antoinette de Vaudrac, terrible with her secret knowledge; and that Englishman Wade, so obviously attracting both these beautiful women by his meek hypocrisy and easy manners.

Farthing wandered about the dark, warm town, his passion gradually subsiding under the interest of the new and attractive scene. Partly freed of his oppression, he began to look about him at the shops, the crowds, the lights. The warmth comforted his travel-stiffened bones, and he welcomed a sensation of luxuriance. With Farthing, to welcome was to capitulate. He had to indulge this new mood of luxury. Stopping at a jeweller's shop

on the Cannebière, he looked at the watch on his red, freckled wrist, and remembered that while fingering it in the train, he had broken the main-spring.

Obeying an immediate impulse, he entered the shop and spent three hundred out of his two thousand francs on a new watch, leaving his old one behind.

Two hours later, tired, hungry, and irresolute, he was suddenly smitten with misgiving. He had bought that watch out of Marie's money! Cursing his fate for making him such a special brand of impractical fool, he decided that he must seek a cheap lodging down near the docks.

When he found that quarter, however, he was afraid to inquire at any of the dubious-looking pensions and hotels. Again and again he forced himself to peep in past the entrances, only to retreat timidly. He was disgusted by the dirt, the blowsy women, the half-oriental men peering like earwigs from the bureaus and reception-rooms.

Still cursing himself for his folly, and now also very petulant because he was so hungry and foot-sore, he went into the largest and most respectable restaurant he could find in the neighbourhood, and ordered a *bouillabaisse*. The place was crowded, but nobody came to his table until he was half-way through the meal. Then, refreshed and with renewed confidence, he looked up to see that two men were about to sit down. One of them was heavily built, with brilliant Gascon eyes that roved

triumphantly, pouring forth illimitable energy, enthusiasm, and curiosity. Since they missed not even the most inanimate detail of their environment, it was inevitable that they should flash over Lincoln Farthing and compel his attention. Half unwillingly—for he hated compulsion—he looked up and saw those eyes focused on him for a moment, like the beam from a lighthouse. Then they passed on to the other man, and by their fiery light—for they seemed to illuminate wherever they fell—Farthing recognized the little man who had spoken to him in the train.

Feeling now more expansive, Farthing nodded. The little man half-bowed and turned obsequiously to his companion, who again looked at Farthing and inclined his head slowly. Even the rebellious Farthing was impressed. During the next half-hour he glanced furtively from time to time at this august figure, wondering where he had seen these features before. Then, suddenly, he recognized them. Of course, he had seen photographs in bookshops and in certain newspapers. This man was Léon Daudet, the leader of the royalists, editor of the *Action Française*, and author of so many books that he must surely be the most indefatigable propagandist writer since Voltaire.

No sooner did Farthing make this discovery than he acted upon it. With flushed face and eyes agog with excitement, he leaned across the table and spoke, addressing himself vaguely to both the strangers:

'Excuse me, but are you Monsieur Léon——?'

'Hush,' cried the little man, looking timidly from his chief to this impulsive enthusiast.

The great man, however, only smiled, and nodded assent. He turned a kindly eye on Farthing.

'And you, monsieur?'

Warmed by this approving glance, Farthing talked freely; perhaps too freely. They learned that he was a keen reader of M. Daudet's works, and one who was anxious to become a recruit for the Cause. They understood that he was likely to be useful should he espouse that Cause, since apart from his native ability—it was only incidental that he was the son of a great artist—he had many rich and influential friends.

The reaction from despair and self-condemnation was so complete that he spoke with eloquence and wit. For more than twenty minutes not even the great journalist could interrupt him. As for the little man, he listened, enraptured by such praise offered so spontaneously to his chief, and to the Cause in whose service he was so humble a lieutenant.

Then suddenly, overcome by his own temerity, Farthing paused, and the great man took this opportunity to begin. He deluged Farthing in eloquence. The poor fellow felt it rolling over him like a Pacific surf, warm, sun-laden, superb in its colossal rhythmic waves engendered over vast oceans of thought, emotion, and experience. He had never known anything so stimulating. He sat with his elbows on the table, his chin resting

in his hands, nervously working a dead cigarette between his lips. Nothing escaped him: the gesture, the light of heroic idealism, the youthfulness and romance, the subtle powers of persuasion. Sometimes he had to shut his eyes to ward off that burning gaze. He was grateful, he was flattered, that he should be singled out for such a display of rhetoric. The famous leader of one of the most picturesque causes in the world was pouring out to him all the hopes and aims and enthusiasms of a lifetime. He began to revive under the incantation, to believe that he had inspired it, that the master had recognized a confederate spirit and was pleading for his collaboration. He forgot the other auditor sitting at his side, gazing respectfully and patiently from master to neophyte while fumbling with certain papers from the portfolio. From time to time this shadowy figure made as though to interrupt, but the flood flowed on, giving him no opportunity, and at last he resigned himself to wait until it was exhausted by its own strength.

When that moment came, following a pause, an uplifted hand, a flash of fire that illuminated the whole restaurant, Farthing shook his head, blinked, and prepared to speak, hardly able to pay attention to the magnificent recapitulation and finale of this symphony of eloquence. And in the silence that followed, he found himself talking vaguely, incoherently, pleading for admission into this life of high purposes, expostulating against his own fears and secret shames in the effort to persuade the

master that here was a recruit worthy to do some humble and possibly some notable service for the Cause.

He was not even surprised at the cordial reception given to his words, for by now he had completely re-dramatized himself and the circumstances of his life. Another hour passed while the three patriots intoxicated each other with this heady wine of an impossible political idealism; and at the end of it the lieutenant proposed a toast: 'Royalism, Classicism, and Catholicism!'

They drank in silence, and Farthing found himself. He believed at last that his vocation was clear. All the mess and confusion and failure of the past had been a preparation for this. People would see! Those who had sneered at him and humiliated him would learn to be ashamed of their lack of understanding. And that very speedily, for he was resolved to act at once. He would return to Paris, to the heart of France, and lose himself in this noble work. But first he must go home and break the news. Marie must be repaid her money—or at least, what remained of it. And then he would be conscience-free, independent of women, fighting amongst men in a man's cause.

Reckless with excitement, he parted from the master after arranging to call at the office of the *Action Française* a week later to receive a more formal initiation into the mysteries and technique of the cult. He walked out of the restaurant into another world. Everything now was explainable.

The traffic of people and vehicles, the noise and glare and confusion no longer terrified him. Returning to the more respectable part of the town, he walked in exultation, undisturbed even by the accosting of prostitutes and the repulsive coloured boys.

Now that he was entering on a new life, it did not matter if he should spend a few extra francs on his lodging for the night. Money would come now with all the other certainties. It was almost a matter of duty for other people to realize the miracle that had taken place, and to help him on the way. He would soon be in a position to return these small obligations. Why, the whole of France, with all its fabulous glory, its wealth, its history, lay before him.

Ah! France! Let her once more be freed of this political incubus, this gang of international adventurers who were bleeding her as white as her own sacred lilies! At that moment, as he lay in an elegant bedroom in the hotel recommended by the little lieutenant in spectacles, he felt himself to be French in every element of his being. Her soil was in his bones. He was her son, eager to fight for her, to die in her service, driving out the foreign parasites who were drinking her life-blood. People such as that American Mrs. Gould, or that Englishman Wade.

## CHAPTER XXIV

## EVEN DEATH CAN FAIL

ANTOINETTE DE VAUDRAC and Miriam Fletcher sat talking in undertones by the window of the studio looking out on the moonlit courtyard. The room was in darkness, except for a half-cone of light below a shaded table-lamp set on a stool between the two women. Antoinette leaned forward, seeking the light, for she was busy sewing. It gilded the white material in her hands. They, too, were touched with gold. Leaning thus, with head and shoulders foreshortened in the lamplight and the division of her breasts accentuated by the shadow, she made a pleasing spectacle for Miriam, who sat nearer the window with a moonbeam streaming into her lap and immortalizing the book and the idle fingers clasping it.

In spite of the tragic circumstances, the conversation of the two friends was peaceful. From time to time one or other of them would glance over into the darkened corner where Julius Farthing lay, hovering between sleep and unconsciousness. Both watchers were alert, wondering what he might need if he should wake, and how they should divine his need. For now his sole means of communication was by the expression of his eyes. Only that afternoon Antoinette, weeping over the task, had cleaned and packed away his instruments. She

had done it secretly while the other women were out, for she was not able to acknowledge what she knew to be true, that Julius Farthing would never work again. She had crouched over the bench guiltily, afraid that she might drop one of the tools and so betray what she was doing. It would have been terrible if he should have wakened and seen her. Even now, sitting quietly, needle and thread stitching peace and resignation into her work, she felt the tears rise again to her eyes as she contemplated her callous act. It had been like burying him alive!

Miriam saw her self-reproachful glance towards the empty bench.

'Toni,' she said, nervously turning the book over and over between opaline fingers, 'you mustn't grieve about it, my love. Think of what he *has* done, and how long he has laboured, and enjoyed every moment of it.'

Antoinette wanted to reply that this only made things more heartbreaking; that the man was still so young, so eager to live and learn and practise.

'Yes, but what will he *do*, what will he be *thinking?*' she whispered, awe-stricken by the magnitude of her question.

Miriam paused before replying, anxious to comfort her friend with no shallow and facile sympathy. She respected and loved Antoinette, and her heart was heavy because she knew how devoted to the old artist the girl had been.

There was not, however, any possible reply to

Antoinette's question. Miriam hoped that her own physical shrinking was not observed. She steeled herself to the task of distracting her friend's mind, for to hover over this problem was dreadful. It could bring only despair and a blind rebellion against the mystery of life, an outcry against the Power who might be responsible for such incredible situations in the process of nature.

'We have to think about Minna,' she said. 'If Julius should not recover, she will be broken. And there is Lincoln. What will they do between themselves?'

But this was another unanswerable question, and the women sat in silence, each pondering these problems in her own way, and finding nothing to say. In their impotence they sought a way of escape, the one in her book and the other in her needlework.

A quarter of an hour passed without any sound except the occasional shifting of the fuel in the stove or the cry of an owl from the orchard. Then a sigh from the figure on the bed caused both women to look up. They glanced apprehensively at each other and Antoinette rose, laid her needlework in the chair, and went over to the bed. Miriam also rose, took a few steps, and stopped in the centre of the room, waiting for a sign from Antoinette. She heard the rustle of the bedclothes beneath the ministering hands, and she found herself thinking, not of the tragedy of the sick man, but of the infinite resourcefulness of the French girl who seemed so

oblivious of theories and principles of living, and who was so deft in the practice of life.

This slight disturbance was enough to prevent the watchers from resuming their occupations, and they sat, leaning toward each other, gradually dropping into a whispered conversation that tacitly avoided the grief and fears lying between them. They discussed their projects of hotel- and shop-keeping, and this led to the question of premises.

'What is the matter with Mr. Wade?' asked Miriam suddenly.

'Why? Do you blame him so violently?'

Antoinette smiled as she asked the question, and Miriam looked at her quickly. But Antoinette betrayed nothing.

'I *did*. He disappointed me. He is a remarkable man, and I suspect him of being very clever. I hoped that he and Charles together would make my shop a wonderful thing. Have you noticed?'

'Yes, it is astonishing. I have never known Charles so attracted before. He is working harder than ever, and always seeking the approval of this Englishman who would be the last person in the world ever to offer an opinion or a judgment.'

'Oh, you believe that? You don't think he's a coward, running away from himself; or that he's a quietly selfish person looking after his own creature comforts?'

Miriam's asperity startled Antoinette, and she looked up, flushed and protective. 'Do you dislike him?' she demanded.

Miriam could not reply. She could not say she disliked him. Indeed, her feelings were too complicated. She was angry that he had succumbed so easily to Josephine. But she was also grateful, for Hilaire knew, and she recognized that he welcomed the opportunity for releasing himself. And that meant a revival of her own hopes.

But also she suspected that Antoinette as well as Charles had discovered an emotional interest in this stranger; and that, again, was an unusual and serious matter; so serious, indeed, that she felt Antoinette must be warned of this too-easy affair looming between Josephine and Wade. She was considering how to mention the matter without vindictiveness, when Antoinette spoke.

'No, Miriam, you don't dislike him. How could any woman, I wonder? Yet I have heard about his marriage. Charles has dropped a hint—the usual war-time and youthful mistake which so many Englishmen made. How badly they are educated!' She paused and smiled. 'But now he is divorced, after years of misery. And all this—this cowardice as you call it, is the after-effect.'

'Don't be angry with me, Toni.'

Miriam was smiling serenely again, and Antoinette looked up with perhaps a gleam of gratitude and relief.

'Yes,' she continued, 'I believe that he is merely wounded, exhausted. Charles's instincts are never wrong. He is like a cat. And he never ceases in his praise of Gregory's ability. They meet

often, and sit silent together, discovering things in common. And then again, Miriam, Hilaire is so respectful. What do you say to that?’

They both laughed silently.

‘You never disguise your feelings, Toni; or your loyalties. Is there anybody you hate—or are afraid of? Anybody at all?’

The smile died in Antoinette’s eyes, and she stared at Miriam.

‘Yes,’ she said, lingering over the words, ‘I am now afraid of—of his son!’ And she half-glanced towards the bed.

‘But why? Haven’t we talked that out together?’

‘Because I am not an American woman. That may be why. And now, this mad action at such a time! How was I to know what the future——’ But she stopped and bit her trembling lip. Then, shrugging her shoulder, with an air of disgust, she exclaimed: ‘Ah, what does it matter?’

‘Less than you fear, Toni. Believe that! Less than you fear. Let me tell you——’

But Miriam’s confession of her knowledge was cut short by a sound in the courtyard. They heard the clash of the gate, and heavy, slouching footsteps.

‘Who’s that?’ whispered Antoinette. ‘It can’t be Marie returned?’

‘No, she wouldn’t slam the gate.’

They both rose and peered through the window. A shadowy figure stood by the kitchen door. But

it was locked, and the figure, after hesitating, moved on towards the studio.

'They've found him then,' said Antoinette, calm and matter-of-fact. And she walked over and opened the door to admit Lincoln Farthing.

For a moment he stood silent, disconcerted by finding the two women from whom he had tried so blindly to escape. But recollection was quickly banished, and he held out his hand, gripped Antoinette by the elbow, and urged her over to Miriam, whom he seized by the hand.

'What do you think, girls?' he cried, his voice alarmingly loud and hearty. 'Who do you think I've met? And we got on together like a ship on fire. He's absolutely converted me. I'm a different man. Good God, I see my way now. I realize I've only just begun to live. You never heard such a fellow. Swept me off my feet like a whirlwind. And you know, Toni, he's absolutely right. There's no getting away from that. If only people could realize, France would be a new nation. All these financial evils, all these parasitic foreigners, would disappear like a dream.' He drew a deep breath in order to carry on with this enthusiastic tirade; but in so doing he noticed the darkness of the room, and the figure lying on the bed. His mouth fell open, and an ugly glint of obstinate fear was reflected from his eyes as he turned to Miriam.

'What's this?' he said. 'What's the matter?'  
'Your father has had another stroke.'

It was Antoinette who replied, and he recoiled from the bitterness in her voice.

‘Stroke? When——?’

‘The night you left.’

At this, the edifice of excitement crumbled. Farthing stood stricken, his heavy lip hanging down and quivering. His bloodshot eyes rolled upward as though he were in a fit. Leaning on the back of the chair where Antoinette had been sitting, he glared at his father, trying to pierce the darkness.

‘Is it true?’ he murmured, at last. But neither of the women replied.

Then creeping round the chair he stumbled over to the bedside, touched the coverlet with his fingers, and stood for a moment looking down upon his father’s face—the face of a stranger, lacking the spirit of Julius Farthing.

‘What does it mean?’ he whispered, his voice thin and crazy. But still neither of the women answered. They dared not even turn and watch him. Facing each other, with their hands clasped, they waited, ashamed to be spectators of this struggle.

Then a whistling moan escaped from Lincoln Farthing’s lips, and Miriam felt herself seized by his trembling hands. ‘Can’t you say something? Can’t you tell me?’ he cried. And then he suddenly flung his arms round his head and sobbed aloud.

‘Hush! Lincoln,’ said Miriam. ‘You must not disturb him. If he can be left to sleep——’

But Farthing had collapsed into a chair, his head bowed between his knees; and he cried like a child, without shame or restraint.

Antoinette and Miriam stood over him, questioning each other with anxious glances, each assured that it was better for him to vent his grief. Neither wanted to acknowledge that this violent emotion held anything but grief: any chagrin, any anger that this blow should fall upon his new hopes and enthusiasms.

After a while the storm spent itself. Farthing raised his head, and sat silent, staring at the carpet, and twisting his handkerchief first round one wrist and then round the other. The terror subsided from his eyes, but they still seemed to rove beyond his power of control. He looked up, at Miriam and then at Antoinette, with a complete candour and childlike appeal. They saw the real man, the man that might have been except for warping inheritances and upbringing. Here was revealed the love and respect he bore toward his father, the man who had striven so quietly and patiently to protect him from himself. And the women saw that Lincoln knew this.

Miriam stooped and put her arm round his shoulders.

'We must let him sleep,' she said.

'Yes,' he answered, 'I hope so. That's right, isn't it? Tell me, where is Marie?'

'She has gone into Montigny to see her family, and to get a few things.'

'Oh, out?' He shook his head, as though he could not understand. 'She's out, too?'

Then he seemed to recollect something that haunted him. Looking from one to the other, the candour fading from his eyes, he asked: 'Where's mother?'

Antoinette answered.

'She is resting. We take turns in watching, and she will spend the night here.'

'What will—what do you think——?' he began; but he stopped and stared at the door, like an animal in a trap.

His mother stood there looking at him, and her eyes also were wild with terror, which gave place at once to a grim stoniness. Antoinette stepped forward to appeal to her. But she brushed the girl aside, and advanced slowly towards her son.

'You see?' she said, clutching her dressing-gown round her like a gaunt Clytemnestra.

Lincoln stood up, his face clay-coloured; the breath straining through his white nostrils. He did not answer, and his silence roused her to action. She stood now only an arm's length from him.

'Do you see?' she asked again, her voice breaking. 'Your handiwork? Are you still proud of it?'

He held out his hand, pleading with her.

'Mother, don't! You know——'

'Yes, I know. I know you have destroyed him. Destroyed him. Worse than death. You have destroyed us both. That is your work: What right have you, I say, what right?'

And suddenly she raised her fist and struck him in the face, breaking the skin of that thick lower lip which had haunted her since his birth; the work of her own body in his.

Stepping back, he stumbled over the chair and fell to the ground, where he lay for a moment before rising to his knees and crouching, glaring at her with all the obstinacy and perverseness returned upon him.

Antoinette had flung her arms round Fräulein Spaeth, intending to coax her from the room, when a little gasping cry from the bed arrested them all. The high voices and the noise of Lincoln's fall—or perhaps some deeper awareness—had summoned Julius Farthing back to consciousness. He struggled to move, to speak, and as Miriam lifted the table-lamp, its light fell on his face. Once more the brilliant grey eyes shone out on the world. He turned his head towards the light, and the useless muscles of his mouth moved. The agony, dumb and therefore infinite, in his eyes, was directed towards the centre of the room. He seemed to know that his son was crouching there.

Antoinette was the first to move. Turning from Fräulein Spaeth, she seized Lincoln by the arm and whispered something which caused him to rise and go with her to the bedside. Julius's struggle to speak, to appeal to his wife and son, grew more appalling. A babbling murmur broke through his useless lips, and tears flowed down the sick

man's temples. With a gigantic effort of will he half raised himself, and turned his head towards Lincoln; then looked beyond him, seeking his wife. But he could not see her, for she remained standing where she had struck her son. The effort to find her was maintained for some moments, until Antoinette realized what he wanted. She stepped back hastily, crying out: 'Come, Minna, quickly, quickly!'

But it was too late. The struggle, the last attempt at peace-making between these two people whom he loved, these two so fatally alike, had exhausted him. Uttering a moan that sounded sufficiently human to be a cry of despair, the husband and father surrendered. The happy artist was dead.

## CHAPTER XXV

### DEFEAT AND RESIGNATION

LONG after daybreak, the morning moon lingered over La Genevraie. The pale, transparent shape in the windless sky, silent as the air and the trees and the broken iris blades reflected in the water of the canal, might have been the spirit of the departed man, homesick and reluctant. The news of Julius Farthing's death had spread and locked the village into silence. Madame Mattay had drawn the curtains over the windows of the inn, and shut

the ever-open front door. Monsieur's seat on the bench was empty. He had gone with Miriam to Nemours to make arrangements about transporting the body of Julius Farthing to Paris, where it was to be buried in the cemetery of Père Lachaise, near the tomb of Hector Berlioz, another artist whose domestic life had been a stormy one.

At ten o'clock in the morning Antoinette, crossing the courtyard to lay her exhausted body on the bed in Lincoln's room, looked up wonderingly at the sun, whose beams peered through the tall gates, casting long bars of shadow along the gravel almost as far as the back wall and the plot of frost-bitten zinnias.

Antoinette was grateful for the light, the faint warmth, the sanity, after a night of horror. Her mind held only a confused recollection of what happened after Julius Farthing fell back in her arms. She remembered turning from the bed to see Lincoln Farthing and his mother standing face to face, each daring the other, in silent challenge, to be the first to vent grief, or to approach the dead. She remembered that Miriam had stepped between them, taken them both by the hand, and implored them to forgive each other. But she might as well have prayed for fire to forgive water, or for self to forgive self.

Struggling to the surface of his despair, Lincoln was the first to move and to speak.

He lifted his arm to shake off Miriam's restraining hand; and freed, he looked down at his father

and at Antoinette who knelt praying by the bedside. Then suddenly he turned, with a paroxysm of nervous coughing that brought the blood rushing to his head, inflamed his eyes, and set the broken lip bleeding again.

‘Thank you—*mother!*’ he said, giving the sanctified word such a twist of diabolical irony that it sounded like a malediction. ‘You won’t—you won’t be bothered by me again.’

For a second he stared at her, believing his words, appealing like a frightened child for comfort in the night. But the mother who might have answered this silent appeal was blind and frozen, and it was lost for ever. And he with it. His face hardened, the bloodshot eyes glared meaninglessly, and he turned from her.

‘I’m going,’ he said to Miriam. ‘I’m going. It isn’t finished, either.’

While the women were still trying to comprehend, he had gone. They heard his footsteps up the courtyard, and the clash of the small gate by the kitchen door.

Antoinette, confused by exhaustion, crept into the bed, pausing only to slip off her shoes. Sunlight played round the room, flashing from the mirror and creeping endearingly under her closed eyelids. It played upon her memory, adding a touch of warm reality to the picture of the three women standing in the lamplight listening to the silence after the departure of Lincoln Farthing.

She and Miriam had been forced to take part

in the sequel, doing what they could to restrain the violence of Minna Spaeth's reaction. They had watched the hardness and anger die down; they had heard her utter a long piercing cry, calling her son back. They had watched the cruel realization shatter her mind.

Those dreadful hours were past, and Antoinette could sleep. Minna was calm now, sleeping under the influence of the sedative given by the doctor. Poor, broken-hearted Marie, quiet and practical after her crisis of grief, was working in the kitchen, and watching. It was safe to sleep now, until Miriam's return. Nothing more could be done, nothing more could happen, until then.

Neither Antoinette asleep on the other side of the courtyard, nor Marie at work preparing lunch in her kitchen, saw the door of Fräulein Spaeth's room slowly opening as the grief-maddened woman looked out to assure herself that she was unobserved. Satisfied, she shut the door behind her, and hurried along under the wall of the house, silently following her silent shadow into the studio.

For a moment she stood irresolute in the darkened room. Then she approached the bed, timidly put out her bony hand, and turned down the sheet. There lay the man who had first been her lover, his youth restored by death. His face was calm, and the hands folded on his breast still had the quality of skilfulness.

They seemed to affect Minna poignantly, for after staring at them, she put out a finger, touched

them, and fell on her knees, pressing her lips to them and murmuring, 'It was not my fault! Julius! Julius, it was not my fault!'

Except for this little outbreak, she showed no emotion. Rising dry-eyed from her knees, she crossed to the window and, peering out suspiciously, satisfied herself that nobody was approaching, then walked about the room as though summoning herself to some larger purpose. Suddenly she stopped before the cabinet, drew out a drawer, and selected one of the graving tools which Antoinette had so stealthily packed away.

Returning to the bed, she stooped over her lover, and when she drew back, his right hand clasped the instrument in the peculiarly personal way which she had watched year after year during the patient creation of many masterpieces. She contemplated her handiwork for a moment; then shook her head and turned away. It was incomplete. Something was missing. Julius had never held the tool quite like that.

In turning away, her eyes fell upon a small photograph of Lincoln, taken when he was a boy. He was standing knee-deep in the grass in the orchard, with his arm upraised holding a pair of stilts. Perhaps he had failed to mount them, for he was half-laughing, half-weeping. The effect of this mingled emotion was very appealing. He seemed to be an embodiment of innocent credulity cheated and betrayed, pleading for reassurance.

Glancing back at Julius, Minna took up the

photograph and put it in the bosom of her dress. Then without further delay, she opened the french window, shut it behind her, and crept stealthily through the orchard. She passed from shadow to shadow, her figure dappled with light that fell caressingly over her as it would have done over a young girl making her way to a secret tryst.

Reaching the canal, Minna turned and walked along the towing-path, still passing through alternate light and shadow under the thinning poplars. Once she stopped, and looked back across the reeds to the house. She stared at it, standing motionless as a statue. Then she shook her head hopelessly, and murmured 'No!' aloud. Looking back again, she momentarily weakened and leaned against the trunk of a poplar tree, covering her face with her hands and trembling violently.

The splash of a rat diving into the canal roused her, and she looked up, angry with herself. The morning sun stood about the house, veiled it in a nimbus of dusty light, dew-laced and web-trailed. It seemed a part of nature rather than a habitation, a wild harvest-mound piled up by the winds of the years.

Minna walked on again, pausing only to pluck the long skirt of her dress from the clutch of a briar. She stumbled up the slope down which her son had fallen only a few days ago, and at last she stood on the bridge, looking south along the straight path of the canal between the poplars. They were bare, except for a few leaves at their

tops, which the sun now gilded. The lampless moon hung above the canal, and its faint image lay reflected in the water.

After resting for a moment, looking intently at this ghost, Minna walked a few yards down the road. She appeared to be searching for something, for she glanced to right and left as she went. At length, on a heap of road-metal beneath a canopy of honeysuckle, she saw what she wanted. It was a heavy iron bar. Picking it up, she pondered its weight, and laid it carefully down by her side while she sat on the stones. She took off her silk scarf, and putting her hand into the bosom of her dress, drew out the photograph of her son Lincoln and stared at it for a long while, questioningly. Then she leaned over it, shut her eyes, and slowly shook her head.

She remained in this irresolute attitude while recollection rolled over her mind like a returning army after a defeat. It passed, and left her in silence and peace. Looking up, she sensed the perfume of the last honeysuckle sprigs above her. She drew a deep breath, inhaling this embodiment of memory; but recalling her purpose, she shook her head, put back the photograph into her bosom, picked up her scarf and the iron bar, and retraced her steps to the middle of the bridge.

Here she lost no more time. Tying one end of the scarf round her neck, she knotted the other end to the crowbar. Then she mounted the parapet, poised there clasping the bar like a lance, and jumped.

Silence closed immediately over the splash. The agitation of the water gradually and rhythmically subsided, until at last, with little uneasy pulsations, the image of the dead moon settled again on the canal.

Not a breath stirred the golden tops of the poplar grove. A deep, pregnant silence lay over the world. Then, from beyond the bend of the canal, the melancholy winding of Roland's horn warned the solitude that a barge was approaching.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### CEREMONY FOR TWO LOVERS

WADE, after all, failed to escape from these disturbing events. Mr. Fletcher, making business an excuse, fled to London to avoid attending the double funeral, and Wade had to act as his representative. Following the recovery of Fräulein Spaeth's body, the de Vaudracs had made urgent efforts to find her son. The gendarmerie combed the countryside between Moret - les - Sablons and Fontainebleau, and the foresters and artillery were asked to keep a look-out in the forest. For both Miriam and Antoinette, unnerved by the tragedy with which they had been so closely connected, feared that Lincoln also had succumbed to the curse overhanging the unhappy family.

Much had to be done, and it was unavoidable that Wade should be caught up in the gloomy activities. With the de Vaudrac brothers he started inquiries in Paris after the missing man. As he had very little work to do during Mr. Fletcher's absence he spent several days wandering about the streets, sometimes alone, sometimes with one or other of the brothers, looking amongst the crowd and in the cafés for the figure that he half dreaded to find.

This occupation gave him opportunity to think over the significance of his own adventures. He had to acknowledge that that spectacle of Julius Farthing, the victim of emotional ties, had frightened him back into his selfish attitude of cynicism, and that in order to save himself from his own sincerity he had deliberately sought out Josephine Gould, intending to share her life of irresponsible hedonism. He could not carry his self-confession further, for he was not yet conscious of any deeper motive for his incontinence.

Nor had he any incentive to probe deeper. Immediate events justified his cynicism, surrounding him with evidence of the disastrous effects of taking life too seriously and of feeling too deeply; evidence that corroborated his own past experiences. Then again, the immediate effects of his pleasures with Josephine justified themselves. He expected nothing from them, yet he found himself enriched with a new physical confidence gloriously like a return of youth.

Again and again during the three days while he wandered in the streets of Paris, he noticed with surprise and half-frightened amusement that the world was coming to life. It was like a motion-picture that had been stopped, and was now making intermittent attempts to move again. Spontaneous gusts of pleasure, like perfumes, wafted over his mind. His response to them stirred his blood, loosened his muscles, unbound his curiosity. Once this sensation was so acute that he stopped in the street, held out his chilly hand to the rain, and stared at it. Charles de Vaudrac, who had been talking, stopped, and half-turned, charmed by this typical example of the Englishman's originality.

'Why not?' said Wade, musing aloud, as he gazed into the palm of his hand, and flexed and unflexed his nervous fingers. Like his own spirit answering him, Charles replied:

'There is no reason at all—now that you have removed the only reason!'

Wade looked up suspiciously, frightened by this mind-reading. He found Charles looking at him quizzically, a curious light in those full brown eyes. Satisfied that it was not mockery, he smiled. He was still half entranced when he spoke again.

'Will it be too late now, Antoinette?'

Charles lowered his eyes, took Wade by the arm, and walked him on a few paces before he replied.

'No, not too late, Gregory. And my name is not Antoinette—but no matter!'

'What are you talking about?' said Wade, irritably withdrawing his arm.

'You called me Antoinette! Are we so indistinguishable, Toni and I?'

Wade stopped again, and put his hand to his forehead as though he were waking from sleep.

'I 'll swear I didn't! You 're dreaming, Charles.'

'No?' was the dry reply. 'Perhaps I was. We all are. But when this ghastly business is done with, let us talk over the possibilities with Miriam Fletcher. You know, Gregory, I believe that if Lincoln Farthing has gone, she will be a happier woman. He has had some sort of claim on her, some mad, unjustifiable claim, that has bowed her down.' Then Charles added, looking away as he spoke: 'And not her only.'

Wade was afraid to reply. He felt the blood mount to his face and he was gripped by a dull, inarticulate anger. They walked on in silence, immersing into the crowd of glistening umbrellas and mackintoshes.

Standing by the graveside next day, half-sick with nervous misery, Wade let his wits wander from the droning voice of the priest, and recall this conversation with Charles, who now stood opposite him, on the other side of the open grave. A thick mist lay over the Père Lachaise, shrouding the hideous monuments, and drawing a charnel smell out of the soil. The two coffins were lowered, and now lay side by side in a long puddle of yellow water. The fog, the gloom, the

cold, provided an incongruous setting for the last adventure of an artist whose life had been spent in the search for clarity and precision of form.

The mist writhed amongst the neighbouring tombs, tearing itself on the hideous iron spikes and rusty metal flowers and wreaths. At the sound of the handful of earth knocking on the coffins, Hilaire's body shuddered, and he turned away, with his handkerchief to his eyes, and his broad shoulders shaking. Wade looked with downcast eyes, and hands clasped in front of him, absolutely immobile, inscrutable. He was only half aware of the other men, a few friends of the dead artist, and strangers representing certain societies and faculties of art, and an official from the American embassy.

No women were present, and nobody came to mourn Fräulein Spaeth. Her family had not replied to the telegrams and letters sent from Paris. Her son was lost.

Wade looked on, conscious of the full purport of the tragedy. He heard, saw, felt; but his mind was active elsewhere, denying his misery, scoffing at his fears, mocking him, luring him. A rich, expansive dissatisfaction possessed him. He knew that he had taken the road of life again, after years of inaction, and he was craving to be up and away, to justify this impulse toward—toward what? He could not reply, but he knew that the goal was larger than his present adventure with Josephine.

Of all the men standing by the graveside, Charles

de Vaudrac was the only one who noticed a tall figure emerge from the mist, to crouch under the eaves of a mausoleum some fifty yards away. For an instant Charles stared intently, then looked round to see whether any one had remarked his sudden concentration. But nobody had observed him, and he dropped his eyes again, remaining thus until the end of the service.

He was the last of the mourners to leave, and as he followed the others, he glanced back once or twice. He saw the figure move from its hiding-place behind the mausoleum, to creep nearer the grave. For a moment he stood still, irresolute. Then he shrugged his shoulders and walked on. He was not interested now in discovering Lincoln Farthing. Indeed, his whole fastidious nature cried out against it. He hated noise, clumsiness, egotism, uncertainty, and cowardice. And he loved his sister, and respected Miriam Fletcher.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### A TRANSFIGURATION SCENE

WHEN the small party of mourners had vanished in the mist, the hidden watcher emerged, stretched himself to his full height, looked round several times, and then advanced slowly toward the grave.

The two gravediggers, who had returned and were about to plunge their long-handled spades

into the mound of clay, looked at each other and murmured something as the uncouth figure approached.

'I 've a right here, I suppose?' he said fiercely, thrusting out his lip and glaring at the men from wild, bloodshot eyes.

The man addressed rested the spade-handle in the hollow of his shoulder, wiped his hands on the edge of his blue smock, and courteously begged the stranger's pardon. But this did not seem to mollify him.

'Do you know who I am?' he demanded.

'I beg your pardon, monsieur,' repeated the gravedigger, deeply sympathetic towards this person whom he believed to be hysterical with grief. 'You would like to be alone?' And nodding to his fellow he retreated, the other following him and looking back curiously once or twice. When they stopped within sight, the stranger waved an arm imperiously, and they went further off.

Now that he was not overlooked, Lincoln Farthing took off his hat, and peered into the grave. He stood thus for some moments, his face flushed and his lips moving as though he were speaking. Then he shook his head incredulously, stooped lower, and picked up a clod of clay.

'France!' he said. 'The soil of France. We 'll cleanse it now. We are free to work.'

After this Hamlet-like soliloquy, the meaning of which was obscure even to himself, he dropped the clod into the grave. It fell with a loud thump on his mother's coffin.

For a moment he stood convulsed with fear. Then he laughed aloud, a wail of pathetic laughter that caught him and flung him back as though he were on the rack. He picked up clods in each hand, and flung them down; then two more, and more again, raining them down until they made a cannonade on the lid of the coffin. And during this frantic ritual his breath sobbed through his open mouth, and the tears streamed from his eyes.

'You *see*, mother? You *see*?' he shouted. 'You see me now? I've found out, do you see, I've found out! I *know*. I know what to do. It's been all wrong, but I know now!'

Then his mood changed suddenly. The tempest of rage subsided, and he knelt on the trodden earth, rested his hands on his knees, and looked for a long while into space. This reverie was broken at last by another flash of consciousness as he caught sight of his father's name on the brass plate on the other coffin. It glimmered dimly, already misted with the breath of earth.

Putting his hands to his head he began to weep. The paroxysm slowly grew; until the whole man, body, mind, and spirit, was absorbed into this agony of emotion. His sobs were so loud that one of the gravediggers appeared out of the mist, stared at him, then disappeared. After a few moments the man appeared again, and stared longer. Farthing was still bowed and kneeling, his head in his arms, his body shaking and trembling.

The third time both gravediggers appeared,

and now the one advanced timidly, on tiptoe, his spade held up an inch or two from the ground. He summoned up courage and touched the grief-stricken man on the shoulder.

Farthing did not look up. He crouched down still further, like an animal awaiting a blow. But the paroxysm had spent itself, and he ceased to sob, though he was still trembling violently, and seemed unable to lift his head, which was bowed down almost between his legs.

'Monsieur,' whispered the gravedigger. 'It is no use. You will be ill, monsieur.'

Farthing listened. Then craftily he looked up, saw the solicitude in the man's face, and the unspoken query as to his relationship with the dead. After this he quickly regained control of himself, and resting a hand on the ground, he rose to his feet, staggered, and then stood still, breathing like a runner after a race. The gravedigger picked up his hat and handed it to him. He took it, brushed the soil off, and spoke.

'Who am I?' he said. 'Well, you can tell them. I am the son of France. Do you hear that? The son of France!'

And without further explanation he walked away, squaring his shoulders and challengingly throwing his hat on his head.

The two men stared after him until he was lost in the mist. Then they looked at each other, nodded in agreement, spat on their hands and began to shovel the clay into the grave.

After leaving the cemetery, Farthing walked down the Rue de la Roquette to the Bastille. He felt uplifted; purged by the outpouring of his feelings. The experience had been so violent that his mind was still in a tumult. His consciousness clutched here and there at images and fragmentary ideas. He was hungry. He was happy. He knew what he must do. He was no longer ashamed or afraid. He understood women at last. Something had opened his eyes. Mother—but he could not capture any tangible conception of her. She was gone. She had released him. He groped after the significance of those two gigantic facts. They loomed before him like mountains. And now he had to climb those mountains, to proclaim the freedom of his body, and to survey the territory of his soul; the new kingdom to which he had just succeeded as the real king of France would soon succeed when the foreign moneylenders and parasites were driven out.

This happy parallel occupied his mind while he ate a good lunch in a restaurant on the Place de la Bastille. As he paid the bill he recollected that he was still living on Marie's money; but he did not harbour the thought for long. There were other and vastly more important things to occupy his mind: high politics, the new vocation; the new self.

Walking towards the offices of the *Action Française*, he told himself that the whole of his position in relation to women was altered. Something had

happened, and though he could not clearly define what it was, he knew that he was no longer suicidally ashamed. He would show them a proof before long, in the course of his new mission. The loan from Marie, for instance, was a small affair that could be straightened out when he had decided what steps to take in the matter of his parents' money. For the moment, until he had justified his new fervour, he preferred to be lost to the world that formerly knew him. And even when he did appear, to startle those people of his past life, he would not remain long.

Entering the office of the *Action Française*, he asked to see the editor. The harassed clerk handed him a slip of paper, and did not look up, for the telephone was ringing, and several other people stood by waiting to be attended to.

'I want to see Monsieur Daudet,' demanded Farthing in a loud voice.

'Yes; fill up the slip and I'll send it in,' said the reception-clerk.

Farthing crumpled up the slip and flung it over the counter. The clerk looked up, startled, and saw an anger-flushed face, under dishevelled ginger hair, a pair of swollen and bloodshot eyes, a large mouth with protruding under lip. The apparition appeared to impress him, for a self-conscious and slightly anxious gleam appeared in his eyes as he politely pointed out that all visitors had to go through the customary form of stating their errand on one of the printed slips. He then handed

another to Farthing, who snatched it angrily, looked at it, ignored the instructions, and wrote across it: 'The Son of France wishes to see Monsieur Daudet.'

'Send that in. *He* will understand.'

The clerk read the slip, glanced with curiosity at Farthing, then called a messenger.

'Pray take a seat, monsieur,' he said.

After a short interval, the messenger returned and spoke to the clerk, who left his seat behind the counter and came round to Farthing.

'The editor's secretary asks if you will go in, monsieur. The messenger will show you the way.'

With a lordly nod, Farthing walked after the boy, who led him along a dark corridor to a door at the end, at which he knocked. An impatient voice replied from within, and Farthing entered the editor's room. It contained two table-desks, and a few chairs, one being propped against the wall because it had only three legs. Books and piles of papers, box files, and card indexes filled the room, and the secretary had to pick his way carefully when he rose and came forward to greet Farthing. Before he could speak, however, the visitor handed his hat to the messenger and inquired:

'Where is Monsieur Daudet?'

'I am sorry to say, monsieur,' the secretary began, but Farthing again interrupted him.

'I must see him only. Is he in?'

'No, monsieur. The editor is in Bordeaux. He has gone there from Marseilles——'

'Yes, I know. I have just seen him in Marseilles, and we arranged that I should come here as soon as I reached Paris.'

'I am extremely sorry, monsieur.' The secretary was now obsequious. 'If you will give me your name, I will arrange a meeting as soon as the editor returns. But that will not——'

'I can give no other name. The Son of France will be enough.'

The secretary blinked and bowed his head while he pondered what to do next with this unusually difficult visitor. Like all paid servants of a romantic cause, he possessed a technique for dealing with eccentrics.

'I understand, monsieur,' he said softly, without looking up. 'The trouble is that the editor has not communicated with us for some days, and therefore we are not acquainted with the latest developments of—of—but, of course, I understand.'

He glanced up slyly at the visitor and added: 'If you will tell me where we can find you, monsieur—that will be all that is necessary.'

'No—I prefer to—to—— No. I will come again. But meanwhile——'

'Meanwhile, monsieur?'

The secretary had already opened the door and was bowing.

'Thank you,' said Farthing. 'I will leave it until I see him.'

He walked out of the office trailing robes of glory. The secretary obviously had recognized him: the

deferential bow, the courtesy; they were sufficient evidence.

Drunk with this confirmation of his sense of glory, Farthing wandered about the boulevards, oblivious of the damp and cold. His feet were wet, his hands swollen and mottled, his face blue. But he was happy. He knew at last that he was a free man, with a destiny that promised unlimited possibilities.

Towards evening he grew tired, and his temper changed. The conviction of power gave place to impatience, and he began to mutter to himself about the necessity for proof, for making a start, for showing people what should be done.

In order to think out some immediate plan of action, he fortified himself with another good meal and a bottle of wine. Then he sat on in a restaurant smoking cigarettes and sipping cognacs, inflaming his already excited nerves. It was necessary, he told himself, to put one vital question to the test. Still lingering in his mind, an undisputed misgiving that might rise again and wreck everything, even the confirmation offered by the secretary at the office of the *Action Française*, was the memory of his relations with Miriam Fletcher and Antoinette de Vaudrac.

Miriam he was not indifferent to; she had helped him in the past, she had been a good friend, but blindly. She could not have known to what purpose. She was not a Frenchwoman!

But Antoinette was different. It was she who had

disturbed him most deeply, and plunged him into that abyss of shame. Her loathing and contempt seared him still. That dreadful night! He hated to think of it. Something must be done to wipe it out, to convince Antoinette that it was a mistake, that it was premature. He could show her now that he could offer as much as other men. For Antoinette was more than ever desirable now. She was a daughter of France, *the* daughter of France, pure and aristocratic, a child of the régime that was to be restored for the salvation of the motherland, and the expulsion of the foreigners.

These foreigners! They could be used; their money, their—yes, that woman whom he had hated so violently, Josephine Gould, the voluptuary, she could be used with her proud body and fastidious appetites, as a test for him to prove to Antoinette what new power had entered him. And at the same time it would humiliate that woman, who had never lost a chance of sneering at him, of snubbing him.

He knew where to find her, for he had often sent letters round to her flat when he was working for her father, that American usurer. Yes; he could find her, he would go now and proclaim himself to her.

He left the restaurant and made his way rapidly towards Montparnasse, still exalted with his mission. Those fellows in the office had recognized him. Others would recognize him, too. And he would marry Antoinette; the daughter of France and the

son of France. But first, there was this task to be done, this purgation.

The rain beat down on him, the cold numbed his hands and feet; but his eyes were mad with glory, and he laughed with the happiness of power as he climbed the stairs of the building where this American siren flaunted herself so proudly over the sacred city.

He paused at the door, shivered, drew a deep breath, and knocked; three loud, princely knocks.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE ELOQUENCE OF HANDS

THE group of mourners standing outside the gates of Père Lachaise melted away, until only the de Vaudracs, Wade, and a stranger remained. This last, addressing himself to Hilaire, said that he was a picture dealer from London, and that he had come over as soon as he saw in *The Times* the announcement of Farthing's death. He explained that he was very anxious about the work left by the old artist, and that in particular he had a rich American client who had instructed him to acquire as many prints as he could lay hands on.

Before Charles could say anything offensive to the unfortunate dealer, Hilaire told the man that nothing could be done until the heir was found and

the will proved. Meanwhile, he assumed authority and promised to write to London if a decision was reached that the work should be put on the market. The dealer thanked him profusely and departed.

Hilaire turned to Charles and Wade, remarking that it was as well to have as many irons as possible in the fire, and that, no doubt, money would be needed to keep young Farthing going when he turned up again.

'Suppose he doesn't turn up?' asked Charles, disgusted by this chaffering on the threshold of death.

'In that case,' said Hilaire dryly, 'Antoinette inherits.'

'Oh well, for God's sake keep it to yourself,' said Charles savagely, walking away to hide the confusion this news had created in his mind.

Hilaire and Wade looked at each other as they followed him to the Daimler, where Wilson stood on guard over Miriam and Antoinette, who had been waiting there during the ceremony.

Hilaire was puzzled by his brother's discomfiture. Wade was embarrassed by his own knowledge of the reason for that discomfiture. He wanted to hide his knowledge, for if any family explanations were to be made, *he* did not want to be implicated. Antoinette and Lincoln Farthing; the one's welfare depending in some way on the other's disappearance! The idea was repugnant; any sort of association of these two people was repugnant.

He told himself that it was his concern for

Charles that made him feel so strongly on the matter; but when he reached the car and saw Antoinette sitting mute and lost in the corner, he confessed to himself again, that he was still passionately resentful of her past association with young Farthing. He had not confessed so much before, and he was startled, especially as he was now hardly in a position to criticize Antoinette.

He was not surprised, therefore, to find himself grateful to be sitting by her side during the journey back to the studio. Everybody sat in silence, depressed and relaxed by the aftermath of recent events. They all believed that the tragedy was over, and that they could brood upon the futility and wastefulness of it.

From time to time Antoinette stirred restlessly, and sighed with a little catch of the breath that suggested she was fighting to keep back her tears. Following one of these little movements, Wade nervously put out his hand. He could not control his sympathy now that it was once acknowledged. He felt her gloved hand touch his and withdraw. A moment later her fingers touched his again, and clasped them firmly. She had taken off her glove.

Miriam, who was sitting on the other side of him, observed this dumb show, and she was curiously moved by it. She slipped her hand through his arm and gripped it as though she were clinging to him for support. So, for the rest of the way, he sat between them, a silent comfort and pillar of

strength. In the course of the journey both Hilaire and Charles looked round and saw the position. Wade nodded to each of them gravely. Nobody, least of all himself, questioned the spectacle of the sick man turned physician.

Leaving Antoinette, Charles, and Wade at the studio, Hilaire and Miriam drove on to the Hôtel de Vaudrac, where they lunched together. After the meal, which had been eaten in silence, they took their coffee in Miriam's sitting-room overlooking the garden. Darkness was already settling over the town, and the two friends turned their backs to the window, and drew their chairs close together before the fire.

Both were aware of a certain uneasiness due to something other than depression following the funeral. Their mood was anticipatory, not reminiscent. Miriam broke through the restraint which both had felt since they were alone together.

'Tell me, Hilaire,' she said quietly, putting down her cup with grave deliberation, 'do you trust Gregory Wade?'

Hilaire did not reply immediately. He, too, put down his cup, ran his fingers round the inside of his collar, glanced slyly at Miriam, and at last spoke.

'You've already made up your mind, my friend, isn't that so?'

'How do you mean?'

She spoke sharply, and at once he dropped his playfulness and leaned towards her. He frowned, and also spoke sharply, almost with anger.

‘How do I mean? I mean that you have seen this fellow, of whom we know nothing, except that he is divorced from his English wife, creeping into our family and resting there like a cuckoo. And you have had nothing to say against it, eh? Nothing at all! You took his arm this morning; and what could that mean but an encouragement for his philandering with our sister?’

Miriam hesitated before launching her bolt; she was not quite sure of herself or of the moment; but for once she was not master of her feelings.

‘It might have been for his philandering with *my* sister.’

She waited for his anger, but he sat calmly, his hands on his knees. Then he slowly nodded, as though confirming some unspoken comment, and stretched out his hand to take up his coffee-cup.

The act, and the lack of response, roused Miriam to a sudden fury. She jumped up and with a clenched fist dashed the cup into fragments on the floor.

Hilaire, however, was not to be goaded into his usual violent reaction to one of her storms. He seized her wrist, and held up the still clenched fist for her inspection.

‘See, you little fool,’ he said, ‘see what you’ve done!’

Then, when she had seen the blood trickling from the broken skin, he suddenly drew the captive hand towards him, and covered the wound with his lips. She turned her head aside, and wept.

Still retaining her hand, he bound his handkerchief round it as he spoke.

'So you have seen that also?' he said. 'Well, why should you weep about it? Are you in love with him, too? Are all three of you in love with him?'

Miriam put her free hand up to his face, and stroked his cheek. Then she drew his head down to her and kissed him on the lips.

'Yes,' she said, smiling at him again, serene after the storm; 'we are all in love with him in our different ways. Like the three Graces, we are waiting for him to offer the apple. But it will bring harmony, not discord.'

Hilaire stood with her in his arms for some moments.

'You are right,' he said at last, 'we are all indebted to him. I don't know why, the sly rogue!' And he chuckled, paused, then broke into a laughter that shook him so vigorously that he had to drop Miriam's hands. As the earthquake of mirth subsided, his voice emerged, the tossed and shaken words gradually settling to a normal level. 'Yes, I indeed am indebted to him, Miriam. He has taught me something that perhaps needed no teaching, had I not been so besotted!'

Then very gravely, and with old-fashioned courtesy, he stooped over her hand as she sat down.

'Miriam, we could work well together as man and wife. Would you be willing to start your business on that basis?'

## CHAPTER XXIX

## TOO EMPHATIC A PROOF

JOSEPHINE GOULD had a fastidious horror toward death and all its trappings. She refused to allow herself ever to think about it. On the evening when Julius Farthing died, she received the news over the telephone from Miriam without any comment, or any expression of sympathy. For an hour afterwards she battled against a sense of chilling fear, of insult, of treachery, and she only succeeded in conquering it when Hilaire and Gregory restored her confidence by their mock-battle for her favours. In giving those favours so lavishly to Gregory, she was as much propitiating her fears as indulging her appetites.

Since that night she had been unusually disturbed. The incident became more than an incident. She found that her day-time thoughts refused to leave the scene and the moments of that reckless night. She had given herself to him with a new kind of abandonment which left her emotionally tense. No man had ever had such an alarming effect upon her.

Gregory had left a small engagement book on her dressing-table. She intended to return it when he came next night. But he did not come, and looking in it she examined his handwriting, to find that her heart was throbbing and her throat aching.

It was impossible to return the book by post. She would keep it by her until he *did* come. Half angry, half amused at her fondness, she put the book under her pillow.

These emotions so surprised her that she kept away from the family mansion in the Rue Copernic, preferring the solitude and the servantless life of her studio-flat while she was acclimatizing herself to these new latitudes of feeling. What should she do about this gentle, melancholy, elusive Englishman with whom she had so suddenly become associated? What did it all mean? Where would it end? She had begun by shedding his blood; and now she had given herself to him as completely as any woman could give herself to a man.

She did not ask herself what other people might be involved. She knew that Hilaire was glad to escape to where his real affections drew him. She was indifferent to other women's feelings, although she was fond of Antoinette, whose attraction to Wade she had noticed with amusement. It was not so amusing now. Indeed, she disliked the idea of meeting Antoinette, or any of the family.

She would like to see Miriam, but she could not persuade herself to break through her daydream and make the effort. Then again she had a little twinge of misgiving about that deliberate suppression of the news of Julius Farthing's death. She ought to have told Hilaire and Gregory; but had she done so—well, that night of magic would never have been.

During the days of the search for Lincoln Farthing, therefore, she saw none of the people concerned. Her maid called each day to attend to her clothes and personal matters, and to bring her news of what was happening. She went out for her meals and wandered among the shops. But whether reading indoors or walking in the streets she lived in a state of pleasurable but incredulous excitement, her mind as eager as that of a young girl first awakened to the ecstasies of idyllic love.

Two or three times she rang up the Hôtel de Vaudrac, but Gregory was always out. She told herself that no doubt he was helping in his usual quiet, self-effacing way. And the tasks involved were too horrible even for her new emotional mood to face. She could not intrude there until the funeral was over. After that he would come to her.

She was so sure of this that one day she went into a jeweller's shop and bought a man's wrist-watch, and called later when it had been engraved with the initials 'G.W.' She took the little packet home with her and put it amongst her trinkets.

On the day of the funeral her restlessness increased. She swung between depression and a sensuous eagerness as her imagination ranged over the idea of the double death, and the prospect of Wade's return to her that night. He will come if only for relief after that miserable business, she told herself.

Accordingly, she hurried back after an early

evening meal and changed into an austere, low-cut dress that displayed fully her magnificent neck, shoulders, and arms. Having set out the flowers in the studio, she prepared coffee and put the wine, liqueurs, and cigarettes on a stool beside the chair opposite her own.

Then she settled down to read an amorous chapter in Jules Romain's novel, *Psyche*, but broke off with a little secret laugh of anticipatory pleasure. The story was too much in the mood of her own heart, and she preferred to try and withhold herself until Gregory came. She sat with the book on her lap, her hands behind her head, waiting for him. She did not doubt that he would be here soon. It was inevitable. It was fate. The several days' solitude, together with her abandonment of herself to erotic dreaming, had induced a state of mysticism which overwhelmed her. Its richness filled her eyes with depths of light, and added quality to her hair, her skin. Her more habitual boldness of form, her efficient beauty, were softened, clouded, and glorified.

She was so hypnotized by her mood that at first she did not hear the knock for which her whole body was listening. But there it was. He had come. She would go out and receive him in darkness, and draw him into the light, thus——. But he had knocked again. She must hurry or he would think she was out.

Her heart beat fast as she opened the door of the flat.

'You've come? Where have you been all this time?' she said, her voice low and musical.

'Ah! You were expecting me then? I am not surprised.'

The voice was not Gregory's. It was that of Lincoln Farthing, oddly unfamiliar. She turned swiftly, with a dreadful foreboding.

'You?' she said. 'What brings *you* here?'

He smiled as he removed his coat and scarf.

'You are not surprised, are you, José? Why shouldn't I come to see you? We are old friends, aren't we? And I've been through the mill lately, you know. I need some sort of consolation.'

'Well, have a drink,' she said, trying to persuade herself that there could be nothing unusual in this visit. Now that she had recovered from the disappointment she was not really afraid. Why be afraid of this fool, this mother's boy? But he seemed to be different, older, more self-confident, more coherent, as though he had wakened up to a sense of purpose. No doubt the recent troubles had affected him. One had to concede that much, even though he was such an unlicked cub. She tried to feel sorry for him.

'Here, have a whisky,' she said, handing him a glass. 'But I've got folk coming in shortly, so I can't ask you to stay on.'

He refused the drink.

'Listen, José,' he said. 'I'm not the same man you've known. I've been south to Marseilles, and I've had an experience there which has made

the world different. It has opened my eyes, I can tell you. Then—then—well, don't you understand? It has made me want something which I didn't want before. And I must prove that the change is a true one. Everything else has worked out, you see. *Everything* else. They recognize me, from the leader down to the office boy. The men understand. But I want a woman to understand, too. That's why I've come to you. Because you are more of a woman, more than any I know. You see? That is what I want to prove!

He held out his hands to her, and she drew back.

'I don't know what you're talking about, Lincoln Farthing. You've been drinking. What's wrong with you? They are hunting for you all over France.'

'Of course they are, and I shall not disappoint them. They have searched long enough, and France has suffered meanwhile. But I am ready to declare myself, to make myself known soon—now—to-night, if *you* are willing.'

'If I am willing? What are you talking about?'

There was a note of fear in her voice which she tried to conceal. But he detected it, and gained confidence.

'Why are you holding me off?' he said, stepping forward to plead with her. His face was flushed, and his eyes burned. She shuddered as she looked at his raw, freckled wrists and the ungainly hands. She stepped behind the chair, and now stood between him and the door. That was one point

gained. Now she could try to conciliate him. If he was drunk, that would be possible. If he was mad—then she must escape. And she had always regarded him as an abnormal creature. Miriam was a fool ever to have encouraged the poor wretch. Yet, after all, he was pathetic. There was something appealing in him—but not for her—not to-night—not at this moment! She must get him away before Gregory came. What would happen if they met? She knew he hated Gregory, was jealous of him.

‘I’m not holding you off, Lincoln,’ she said, trying to put some kindness into her voice. ‘Only I can’t discuss things with you now. I’ve told you I have visitors coming in, and I must ask you to go.’

This was a mistake. She saw that at once. Lincoln’s lower lip dropped and he breathed heavily. She watched, fascinated, as his white nostrils rose and fell. He began to work his hands about, and in the effort to control himself he took his handkerchief from his pocket and twisted it round his wrist, pulling it tight until the hand grew purple.

‘Oh, you want to get rid of me before your friends come? You’re ashamed to know me, eh? But all that belongs to the past; you don’t understand what has happened!’

He stepped quickly round the chair and stood within a few inches of her. She dared not draw back again.

‘What do you want, then?’ she said sullenly.

‘I want *you*—that is all. You have had lovers. You understand what men want; *men*, I tell you, *men*!’

His voice rose with his excitement, and he caught her by the arm between elbow and shoulder. At the touch of her warm, firm flesh, however, he shuddered, and his eyes stared wildly. But he retained his hold.

‘Leave go, please,’ she said, and after waiting vainly for him to drop his hand, she tried to push him away. The attempt at first was half-hearted, but suddenly she lost her temper, and with a gesture of contempt wrenched herself free.

She stepped back a pace, and was about to turn away; but Farthing, who had not failed to notice how disdainfully she shook him off, now seized her by the shoulders. Again she tried to break away, but in the effort his fingers caught in one of her shoulder-straps and snapped it, so that as she retreated the dress slipped down her arm, tore open, and exposed one of her breasts.

Farthing stared at it with loathing, until she tried to cover it by lifting the torn dress. This action appeared to infuriate him, and he sprang at her, laughing shrilly and again shuddering with nausea as his hands touched her skin. For some moments they struggled together, until Josephine’s garments were torn off her shoulders. By a sudden blow in the face she drove Farthing off, and stood panting, her breasts rising and falling, a little trickle of blood

winding its way between them. Her eyes burned with an anger so active that it might have been delight, a joy of battle. She clenched her fists and waited to defend herself.

Farthing, however, had gained a new strength. Something in the touch of her flesh had confirmed him in his perverseness, stirring him not to desire, but hate. Knowing what that meant, he gave way to a rage of impotent frenzy, and leaped at her. Before she could beat him off again, he bound his handkerchief round her throat, and began to twist it while they swayed and struggled, backing towards the wall.

As the grip tightened, Josephine tried to nod her acquiescence, but he knew now that this was valueless to him, and he did not relent. Her lovely, disdainful mouth opened, her tongue lolled out, and she clutched at the air with weakening hands. One of them caught the flex of the telephone, and pulled down the receiver, which fell over her head and hung near it as she sank, moaning and gurgling, to the floor.

After she had remained silent for some moments, Farthing released his grip, rose to his feet and stared for a long time at the half-naked woman. Nothing moved in the room, except the fallen telephone receiver swinging slower and slower, in a diminishing arc, over the dead body.

Farthing watched it until it was still. Then, with a shrill titter of fastidious disgust, he moved toward the corpse, intending to carry it into the

bedroom. But he could not touch it. His strength and purpose were exhausted. If not in one way, then in another, he had conquered his secret shame. Nothing prevented him now from proceeding with his mission.

Picking up his coat and scarf, he caught up also a long, green silk wrap lying on the chair. He looked at it in bewilderment, then realizing that it had been worn by Josephine, he twisted it first round one wrist, then round the other, wiped a smear of blood from his hand, and finally flung the wrap, as though it were a snake, hurriedly to the floor. Then, reassuring himself that his handkerchief was in his pocket, he left the flat, not even pausing to latch the door. Nobody had seen him come. Nobody saw him go.

## CHAPTER XXX

### CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

GREGORY WADE stayed for luncheon with Antoinette and Charles, intending to leave immediately after the meal, to return to work in the Rue Copernic. He had done nothing since Mr. Fletcher left hurriedly for England, and he felt uncomfortable, wondering why he should take a salary so easily. An hour or two each morning dealing with the mail; a carrying out of telegraphed instructions from his employer; and that was all.

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Now that life appeared to be settling down to normal events, he anticipated that time would hang heavily, and he was not pleased with the prospect. Three months, even three weeks ago, he would have welcomed such circumstances. But now he needed some activity into which he could pour his new fount of energy. Life began to be interesting again, and he wanted to use it, to express his half-timid gratitude at this awakening.

How inexplicable, he told himself, to be sitting at this meal, after such nervously close participation in a tragedy of futility, listening like a sick man at daybreak in June, to the first prelude of birdsong. Even the fact that his mind could at this moment create an image of hope and delight was astonishing. And he was astonished at his own astonishment, wondering, too, at the sloughing off of resentment, suspicion, and all the other armour of pride.

Brooding over these matters, he sat silent at the table, looking up as Antoinette or Charles spoke, aware of yet removed from their desultory conversation. They also did not appear to be unhappy. Antoinette, who had suffered so much in the agonies of her old friend and in the circumstances of his death, seemed now to be relieved by the fact that an end had come. She resigned herself to that, and fed upon a native philosophy of her own, that taught her to value unconsciously the present moment, and to waste no grief or regrets over the past.

She looked very slight in her black clothes, and

her face was paler than usual, so that her large eyes shone even more strikingly. Yet in all this panoply of sorrow, she did not give Gregory the impression of mourning. Sitting opposite her he sensed, like a diviner, a source of happiness in her, an inexhaustible spring that welled up in a rhythm of its own apart from the droughts and floods of circumstance. He felt this without looking or speaking. He was more conscious of it now than he had ever been, and he was content to remain near her, laving his awakened mind in that quiet, generous pool.

After clearing away the meal the three friends talked without restraint about Julius Farthing; his work, his life, his reputation. Charles brought out a portfolio of etchings which the artist had given to Antoinette at one time and another. Examining them one by one, Wade forgot his resolution to return to work. Thoughts of another kind of work warmed him; work such as he had dreamed of twenty years ago at the beginning of his professional life, when his world was young, and he a pioneer in it. The moment and the mood together enabled him to appreciate the whole personality living in these prints. He traced its growth, its increase of strength, of economy, its fine early pride and aggressiveness, its later serenity.

The man, the circumstances, the achievement, set him thinking about his own life. He found, almost with a sense of awe, that he was no longer putting up barriers. He even began to talk about himself, and Charles and Antoinette listened

intently, glancing at each other from time to time, surprised and gratified. He was conscious of their silent communication, but he did not resent it. Indeed, it added to the intimacy, the confidence. Their united understanding was deeper and richer even than the sympathy each offered separately.

When Charles left, to give a lesson in life-drawing to a number of pupils, Gregory also got up and apologized for staying so long.

'It's almost dark,' he said, looking through the gloom into Antoinette's eyes. They were bright with tears, reflecting the last of the daylight. 'Why, have I depressed you, Antoinette?'

'Yes, it is almost dark,' she said, ignoring his question. 'Wait another half-hour, and it will be the English tea-time. I will make you a cup.'

So they sat down again, and Antoinette talked about his two children, until he forgot the pain and the estrangement, and searched his memory to satisfy her hundred and one matter-of-fact questions about the boys.

'You will soon have everything settled, and then you can bring them over for holidays,' she said.

'Good Lord!' he replied, laughing at her simple solution of so many problems. 'That's hardly possible. For one thing, where should I keep them?'

'Bring them to me,' she said, as though surprised at his obtuseness.

The idea so startled him that he left his chair and walked up and down the studio, agitated by a

joyous incredulity. Finally, he came close to her and said, his voice dull with the weight of feeling: 'Do you mean that?'

She looked up at him.

'Well, who else is there to have them, stupid?'

'But—but Antoinette, why should you take on——?'

'I 'll make the tea,' she said.

He was still marvelling about this while dealing with the day's correspondence, alone in the big house. Miriam rang up during his dinner, which he ate alone, to say that she and Hilaire would come home later as they wanted to consult him. As she was about to ring off she hesitated. He heard her murmur something, and then she spoke again.

'Are you there, Gregory? Listen, isn't it odd that to-day of all days one could be so happy as I am?'

'I think I understand,' he said, with such significance that she laughed.

'Why, of course, you understand, since you are mainly responsible.'

'What do you mean?' he asked, bewildered.

But she had rung off.

Before he had hung up the receiver, however, he realized what she meant. *She* knew, everybody knew, about his visit to Josephine. Antoinette knew! Did she? One woman could not keep such news from another. And it would be passed on to Charles, and brother and sister would discuss

it together, would they not, and decide—well, what *would* they decide? Neither of them was in a position to judge him, after all. Charles with his charming *midinette*; Antoinette with—what was the word used—her *complaisant* attitude toward Lincoln Farthing. *That* fellow! Good God, it was inconceivable. Such a woman as Antoinette de Vaudrac, with her shrewdness, serenity—different from Miriam's serenity—her common sense, her Frenchwoman's art of living; no, it seemed to be impossible that Lincoln Farthing, poor beggar, could have—well, why not? The fellow was a man, surely, and he had a way with women. Yet something was incongruous—some faculty or lack of faculty about the fellow, impossible to place it; but one's instincts suspected it in the man.

Well, there the fact stood, Gregory told himself as he walked back to the dining-room to finish his meal. But he was too much agitated to eat any more. For one thing, he wanted to know why in heaven's name he should be so anxious to keep the knowledge of this peccadillo from Antoinette. He could not think coherently about the matter. Her name kept ringing in his head like the sound of a bell. He repeated it aloud, rhythm with rhythm, then flushed at his own folly, and decided to go for a walk to calm himself down.

He put on an old overcoat and a cap, and left the house. A wind had risen and blown away the fog. The town lights glittered, and beyond their brilliance a few dull stars hung. Wade met

Wilson coming up to the house from the garage, and they stopped for a chat.

'Just been giving the car some oats,' said Wilson. 'She 'll be growing fat if this is all the work she gets. When is the guv'nor coming back? Not that he makes much difference. Can't you persuade him to go down to Italy for the winter, sir? That would make a good trip; give her a good try-out crossing the Jura.'

'By God, I wish we could, Wilson,' said Wade, with such emphasis that the man was startled.

'Why, getting fed up, sir?' he asked. 'We seem to have been here a lifetime, I must say.' And they parted, laughing.

Fed up? thought Wade, turning up his collar against the wind; no, far from it, my friend, far from it. A bit too much going on, that's the trouble. Antoinette offering—*asking* for him to get the children to France for a holiday! It really had knocked him over! All this sense of being a fine fellow again, of becoming a real tough who could use the world as his hunting ground; well, the bottom was knocked out of that attitude.

He saw now that he had been going about, sulking over Antoinette's relationship with that poor devil Lincoln Farthing. Even if it were true, what right—yes, what right had he to take offence and start running amuck? Was it fair to her, to anybody? But Josephine was safe enough; as hard as nails, giving no more than she was prepared to take. What a woman; a superb

creature like a goddess, and about as greedy and unscrupulous.

But was that true? Was he deliberately falsifying his account with her, in order to hide some little discrepancy? *Was* she so indifferent? *Was* he justified? Well, she had given him the invitation, and in no veiled terms. But it was not so convincing now, after the experience of that night together, and the strange parting next morning. She had not shown much indifference then, by God! It was astonishing, that sudden revelation of a tenderness, a friendly, helpful tenderness, with which she had kissed him good-bye, and whispered like a shy girl that she would wait for him to come again.

Thinking it over now, with his mood softened, he could not justify himself. I can't go on like that, he said, relinquishing himself so completely in this battle with conscience, this struggle toward new growth, that he lost all sense of time and place. Almost thinking aloud in the fierce contest, he strode on through the streets, his body following unconsciously the orientation of his mind.

So when he suddenly resolved that he must go and see Josephine and put things right, he was already crossing the Pont del'Alma on his way to the Montparnasse district.

Conscious now of his errand, he hurried on, anxious to get the explanations over. What was he to say? It had been a mistake; his feelings were not involved, and he had no right to treat her

like—but that wouldn't do. Good Lord, what a priggish attitude! One could imagine her laughter, and her contempt. As though *she* cared about his feelings, she would say. And on reflection she might infer that he suspected *her* of more than a passing emotion, a physical indulgence. Then, whether it were true or not, she would let fly. He had yet, he told himself, to discover the depths of that woman's temper. Magnificent! Olympian!

The words rolled over his tongue like drum beats, setting the rhythm of his stride as his body hastened on under the goad of this only half-thought-out purpose. Something deeper than thought drove him on; an intuition warning him of danger, of the need for simplifying his affairs to meet a new spiritual emergency or state of life which was about to confront him. His mind hovered about this activity, like a child amongst the crowds during a revolution; only half grasping the thread of events, the tides of political and social feeling.

He reached the new block of studio-flats still without having defined his mission in coming. It was increasingly necessary to see Josephine; that was all he could resolve; he *must* put things right with her, let her understand—but he did not yet know what it was that he wanted her to understand.

Other people were concerned; he could see that. A most important necessity, to find out who—but at that moment of mental clarifying, he stumbled in the dark. Some idiot of a concierge had not yet switched on the hall light, and Wade, passing

through the hall, caught his foot in the sunken square which should have been filled by a door-mat. He fell against the shafting of the lift, and caught his knee, his knuckles, and the side of his face against the iron grille.

Cursing his clumsiness, he groped about until he found a match. Then he discovered that he had scratched his hand, and torn a jagged rent in his trouser-knee. Fortunately, it was an old suit into which he had changed when he got back from the funeral. He wasn't hurt much; only annoyed by the jolt and the torn garment. He pressed the button and the lift came down. While waiting for it, and while travelling up after he had manipulated the passenger-controlled buttons, he dabbed his grazed knuckle with his handkerchief. By the mirror in the lift he noticed that he had also broken the skin of his cheek-bone.

By God, I look a nice picture, he thought, smiling at his unfamiliar appearance, with coat-collar upturned, cap-peak pulled down, a smear of blood on his cheek. He moistened his handkerchief and wiped the smear away, but another little bead of blood immediately rose. Oh, confound it, he thought, and then forgot it as he left the lift and walked toward Josephine's door.

He was conscious of his hands and knees trembling as he approached the door. His brain was calm; it had given up the unequal struggle to master impulse. Strangely calm. Well, now for it; to face Josephine and put an end to this entangle-

ment. It had been a happy incident, and he was grateful to her. She had drawn him back, easily and carelessly, into the stream of life. It was still carrying him along, warm and rich and adventurous. She had put out her hand and guided him so easily away from that stagnation where his body had been rotting for the past two years—longer than that, indeed, for relations with his wife—who was now a strange fantasy, no creature of flesh and blood—had lost all spontaneity and joy years ago. Indeed, they had never possessed the quality which Josephine had lavished on him.

Yes, he was grateful, and slightly ashamed that such a perfect gesture was, as it were, wasted, being expressive of nothing—well, nothing more than a warm, animal enjoyment. But perhaps that was enough; to be alive, to plunge into the mysteries of the flesh and let life, the wild force of desire, take the responsibility. Life knew what it was about all right. Yes, that was Josephine's philosophy; she lived it consistently. In her way she was a saint, a pagan saint, absolutely faithful to the forces she believed in: life, appetite, the treasure of her five senses. She was strong in that wisdom. He need not worry about her. He could let himself be easy and free-minded, revelling in this return of the joy of life which had gradually been creeping over him like dawn-light during the last few days.

He waited at the threshold, wondering why Josephine's door was open. He could hear no

sound; perhaps she was out. If so, the interview, the explanations, must be deferred. Should he go away again, leaving a note to say that he had called? But that would only make matters more complicated later on.

He lifted the little brass knocker, an effigy of St. Denis. Before letting it fall he listened. A faint, fluttering sound came from the studio. So she must be in, he thought, and he let the knocker fall. But she neither came nor called.

‘Josephine!’ he said. ‘Are you in?’

He heard the fluttering sound again. That was all.

With curiosity now roused, he pushed the door further open and went in. The small entrance hall was in darkness, except for the beam of light from the studio.

‘Josephine!’ he cried again. ‘Are you there?’

The silence now seemed almost sinister, and Wade moistened his lips, intending to call again, but before he could shape the words, that fluttering sound, like a distant bee-swarm, came from the studio.

Without further delay he walked in.

‘What on earth . . .?’ he began to say; for the luxurious room was in a state of chaos. The little table by the arm-chair had overturned, and the bottles, with wine and liqueurs, had rolled over the carpet. He sniffed the sickly odour. A green wrap, twisted into a rope, lay at his feet, and he stooped to pick it up.

Then the fluttering sound! He turned quickly towards the wall-telephone by the door, and there he saw Josephine, her tongue lolling out, her hair disordered, her clothes torn off her. She lay crumpled against the wall as though she had gradually subsided. She was on her side, her head turned towards him, one cheek resting on the floor. A bare arm lay crushed beneath her; the other was rigid, the hand still apparently pressed against the wall. Her full breasts lay heavily, the one over the other, and the deep channel thus formed between them was crimson with blood, which oozed from a wound in her neck.

After receiving this instant impression, Wade lost coherence. He heard himself cry out—he watched himself creep toward her, gripping the silk wrap convulsively. But he did nothing more than stand over her stupidly, looking down at the horrible wreckage of beauty.

How long he remained stupefied he did not know. Two sounds recalled him: the agitated fluttering voice at the other end of the telephone, and footsteps in the entrance of the flat.

He turned guiltily, to see two police officers standing before him. One of them, an elderly man, advanced under cover of a revolver held by the other.

‘Monsieur,’ he said gravely, ‘what does this mean?’

‘Yes, what is it, what has happened?’ Wade replied, thinking the officers must have been in the flat before he arrived.

'That's what we shall want you to explain, monsieur. But one moment, if you please.'

The officer stepped over to the telephone, caught up the receiver, and spoke to the exchange. Then he turned to Wade.

'How did this happen, monsieur? We were summoned by the people at the telephone exchange, who heard signs of the struggle only twelve minutes ago. Are you willing to explain it all?'

Then Wade realized.

'But I can't,' he stammered. 'I've only just come in—I knocked at the door, which was open, and——'

'Come, come, monsieur, you are very unwise. Let me warn you before you go any further that it will do you no good.' The officer took out his note-book. 'Tell me now, you are not French? American? No; English.'

And then followed the usual official ritual of identification and collection of preliminary evidence. While this was proceeding, another officer, a detective inspector, entered the room, nodding to his colleagues without speaking, and listening as he also took notes and measurements. He was followed by the concierge and the police doctor, who waited until the detective gave him permission to examine the dead woman.

Wade had told his story. He was not quite coherent. The shock had so disturbed him that he was trembling violently, and his chattering teeth prevented him from articulating his words as he identified himself and Josephine.

Before asking him to continue with his story, the elderly officer approached and said privately: 'Take my advice, monsieur. Tell the inspector exactly what happened. It will make matters much worse for you later on if you don't.' Then he touched him on the arm, led him to a chair, removed the wrap from his frozen hands and handed it to the inspector, pointing to the blood-stain on it as he did so.

'Madame Gould was a friend of yours, monsieur?' said the inspector, a gentle, sympathetic man with a voice that never rose above a whisper. 'You were lovers?'

The question, like a blast of wind from the outside world, blew through the house of Wade's mind, and in one moment of wild confusion cleared away all the personal fantasy with which he had enveloped his adventure. There the fact stood, and it could no longer be disguised, even though it was a hideous lie which, at all costs, he wanted to suppress. But how could he deny the fact at this stage?

'I suppose so,' he said, sullenly resentful.

'And you quarrelled, monsieur? That is not unusual.'

'No, we didn't quarrel!' Wade looked up defiantly, and stared the inspector in the eyes.

'You didn't quarrel?' The tone was regretful, as though Wade had refused an avenue of escape gratuitously offered.

'Then there is another woman, perhaps?'

This time Wade was better prepared. He had also begun to recover from the shock, and common sense and a desire to save himself steadied his mind. He tried to see his affairs with the detached eye of an observer, and he was able to control his voice as he replied:

‘No; there is no other woman.’

But no sooner had he spoken than he began to share the officer’s disbelief. He had needed to say that, however, to discover the truth. There *was* another woman.

‘No, there is not!’ he repeated with emphasis, looking from one to the other of the inquisitors.

The gentle detective stroked his beard and looked at Wade severely.

‘Well, monsieur, what other explanation have you to offer? You have been struggling. Your clothes are torn, your face and hands are scratched. We find you with the twisted scarf in your hands.’ He paused, and looked at his colleague. ‘I am afraid we shall have to detain you, monsieur, while further inquiry is made.’

‘But I can tell you no more,’ Wade cried out, terrified that his motive would be discovered. He knew quite clearly now why he had come, and he must never disclose that fact, for Antoinette’s name must not be breathed.

Cold with apprehension, he followed the officers, leaving the detective to continue the search for evidence.

Wade was only half conscious of events during

the rest of the night. He found himself in a police cell, visited from time to time by officials, one of whom produced his engagement book and a new wrist-watch marked with the initials 'G.W.'

'This was found under Madame Gould's pillow. Do you recognize it?'

He only half believed it. He must think out later how it had got there.

'And this watch with your initials?'

He denied any knowledge of that; but he doubted if he was right. Fact and fantasy were no longer distinct.

Another officer came later and asked him if he wanted to communicate with his friends.

'No,' he said, in despair, relinquishing himself to this net of fate suddenly dropped over him. A few hours ago he had been free and incredulous with a new joy in life, his mind awakening to hopes and schemes of activity. Now he was caught, crushed down as he was about to leave the tomb, a Lazarus thwarted.

'There's nobody,' he said.

But as he spoke he knew that he was not defeated. The hope still shone like a lamp in his mind, the mind that had been dark for so many years. He had begun to believe in something; and he still believed. Why should he not act in that belief?

'I have one friend,' he said, 'I was with him at lunch to-day. Monsieur Charles de Vaudrac, will you send for him?'

The officer wrote the name and address in a notebook.

‘Was there nobody later than that, monsieur?’

‘Yes; the chauffeur where I am employed. I set out for a walk to-night after dinner, and I met him as I left the house. We were soldiers together during the war.’

He could not have explained why he added this sentimental scrap of information. It acted, however, like a masonic handshake. The official looked up quickly, a human being again, and smiled.

‘Ah! Is that so?’ he said. ‘I will go myself and fetch him, monsieur. And I will inform your friend, who, no doubt, will arrange for a lawyer.’

Lawyer! Wade’s heart sank again. That meant a trial. This was becoming fantastic, mad. He wiped his face and mouth with his handkerchief and shivered.

He passed another hour in solitude, sitting frozen by fear. Then the door opened and Wilson entered. His whimsical face was puckered with anxiety, and the scarred lip twitched as he spoke.

‘They just fetched me, sir. I say—what does it all mean? I’ve had to answer their questions: when I last saw you, what you were like then, what you said.’

‘Why, what did I say, Wilson?’

‘I don’t remember, sir. Something about wishing we could go off to Italy.’

‘You told them that?’

‘I had to say something.’

'Oh, well, that 'll all be construed against me. It's a nightmare, Wilson, that's all. Don't for God's sake believe it, man, will you?'

'If you say so, sir. But if you don't mind my speaking plain, that woman has been asking for trouble.'

'Yes, and so have I—and we've got it. And now I must get out of it.'

Wilson looked at him, surprised. 'Well, sir, you wouldn't have stood up to it like this a little while ago. I reckon that's a good sign in itself. It gives anybody confidence.'

'Oh, I'm glad it strikes you that way. It seems to me that we shall need a bit of courage. Good night, Wilson, thanks for coming. I'll let you know what I want when my mind's a bit clearer.'

They shook hands, and Gregory was left alone again, to sit pondering the evidence accumulating against him. Nobody had seen him since that moment with Wilson as he left the house. There was no believable alibi. He could not prove that he had walked all the way from the Rue Copernic to Montparnasse on a windy, winter night. No Frenchman would credit such a statement. The action was without motive, illogical. So far as he could recollect, nobody had seen him enter the block of flats. No, it could not be so, for when he stumbled, an observer would have come forward to assist him. And his disordered appearance. Yes; the evidence was against him. Why did he not realize that? It was so strange, suddenly to be

plunged into a desperate situation, with his life, his character, his—his new friendships horribly endangered, and to sit here untouched by despair or anger, or any of those familiar resentments and weights which had held him down for so many years.

Yet he was afraid—trembling like a compass-needle. He felt sick with fear; he wanted to shout out, like one of the poor devils whose nerves gave way in the trenches during a bombardment. And now that he had time to think a little, he was horrified because of Josephine: that superb energy, litheness, pride, suddenly to be degraded like that. By whom? That was it. By whom? Some other lover; a poor wretch whom she had goaded to a frenzy of jealous rage?

He no sooner thought of Hilaire than he dismissed the idea. Hilaire was grateful rather than jealous. But what about that item of news; Miriam's last words over the telephone? She and Hilaire had evidently come to an understanding. Perhaps they were going to marry. If so, Hilaire must have told Josephine. Surely she could not have supplied the jealousy; whipped him with that sarcastic tongue of hers, and thrown him into one of his half-comic fits of baby-anger? It was impossible that they could have such a result. Life played many mad and irresponsible pranks; but *that* was going too far.

There must be somebody else. That was not unlikely. Josephine had a separate life of her own. No doubt she had collected a number of

admirers; and had played with fire a little too confidently. But if so, what was she doing with his pocket-book under her pillow? And what had made her buy that watch?

He writhed uncomfortably under these two questions. Had she really been as serious as she seemed that last morning? If so, she might have been dismissing some other importunate fellow, and he would have resented it? Well, that was not unlikely; and it was a nice responsibility to have to face.

He sat with his head in his hands, trying to reason out that problem, to find a means of blaming himself for what had happened. But he could not. He was sorry for Josephine. The idea of her death made him sick with horror. But he *could* not, *would* not blame himself. He had gone to her freely and naturally, and they had been quite honest about it, giving each other an immediate and complete pleasure. He was able to admit, *now*, that there were certain other incentives on his part, but they had no connection with Josephine or with the incident in itself. The incident! That was all: merely an incident; and with this fantastic, irrelevant result!

It was all very well, however, to feel so confident of his own innocence; but what would the de Vaudracs, and Miriam and her father, have to say? The question brought a wave from the ebbing tide of his old despair, to deluge him with misery. Before he emerged, his solitude was interrupted by Charles, who found him bowed down.

The friends looked at each other for some time without speaking. Gregory stood up, still trembling, but Charles saw at once that here was not a man crushed, humiliated. It was not the same spirit whom he had first known.

Wade, his heart lightened, saw Charles smiling, his eyes fluttering.

‘What does Antoinette say, Charles?’

Charles considered, slowly concentrating his gaze on Wade’s restless hands.

‘She says very little,’ he replied. ‘With Antoinette that is a sign of indignation. She only asked me if I believed Lincoln Farthing was back in Paris, since nobody had seen him since the night his father died.’

‘Lincoln Farthing?’ Wade was utterly incredulous. ‘But surely——?’

‘Surely what?’

‘Surely Josephine did not——’

‘She was quite eclectic, I imagine.’ Charles’s face was a mask of slightly stupid innocence.

‘But Charles, he hated her, he was afraid of her. He knew she despised him. She was about the only person who was impervious to——’

‘That, of course, rules him out,’ Charles said dryly. ‘Oddly enough, I saw him this morning.’ He flickered a shy glance at Gregory. ‘But I didn’t tell Toni. You see, she’s afraid of him. It is a strange, a foreign thing for her to be afraid. One might imagine——’

But he paused, and Wade asked hurriedly:

‘Where is she now?’

‘Well, Hilaire rang up and asked her to go at once to Miriam, who has heard the news, because they telephoned to Josephine and were answered by the police.’

‘So she is at the house, then?’

Charles stole another demure glance. ‘No; she is here.’

He looked up again to find Gregory staring fixedly at the prison wall, his eyes burning with joyous faith.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### RELEASE

DURING the following days, nobody was quite sure whether the laws of nature, of cause and effect, were still valid. At first, Miriam and Hilaire were astonished and indignant at Wade’s arrest, but as time passed without his being able to convince the police of his innocence, Miriam, already nervously distressed by Josephine’s death, added torture to her grief by beginning to wonder whether the police were not justified. She had been to the prison, La Santé, where he had been taken after his first night in the bureau of the Commissaire of Police, intending to see him; but on the threshold she succumbed to a dreadful reluctance, fearful that her bewilderment might be determined, only to

add further horror to her grief. It was not that she distrusted Wade; but all along she had been unhappy about his wilful relationship with her sister, although its consequences had been to her own advantage in driving Hilaire to her arms.

She decided that she could not face Wade, to listen to his protestations of innocence; nor could she bear to see him in this humiliating position. She liked him too well, and if—if he was guilty—but that was unthinkable, and she was ashamed of herself for admitting such a possibility.

But it persisted, driving her to a restlessness that alarmed her friends and infected Hilaire with similar doubts. As he had told himself long before this catastrophe, they really knew nothing about Wade, and he had always been uneasy at the warmth with which Miriam and Antoinette had befriended the unhappy Englishman.

Later in the day following the night of the arrest, he went with a lawyer to see Wade, and was astounded to find him happy and cheerful. They talked together for some time after the lawyer had questioned Wade and made notes, which included the fact disclosed by Charles that Lincoln had been a hidden spectator at his parents' funeral.

Wade seemed to have lost interest in his own situation. All his thought and anxiety were given to Antoinette, Miriam, and the two brothers. He urged Hilaire passionately to take Miriam away, and to prevent Antoinette from coming again to La Santé.

Hilaire, mystified and depressed, left the place

reluctantly. Wade, without any protestations, had convinced him, if indeed he had needed convincing. But it was urgently necessary to get the charming and quixotic fellow out of this dangerous predicament. He was in such a beatific state of mind that he seemed indifferent to danger, and his friends must therefore fight for him.

Hilaire put his point to the lawyer as they drove together to the Père Lachaise, with the intention of inquiring further about the appearance of Lincoln Farthing at the funeral. But the learned man shook his head solemnly and pointed to the evidence.

'That is against him,' he said. 'And so also—if this is a crime due to sexual aberration—are the complacency and sense of relief, in a person who has committed the crime. That is symptomatic, you understand?'

Hilaire did not understand, but he was thrown back on doubts and bewilderments, which were aggravated by the lack of evidence forthcoming from the officials at the cemetery. They were sorry they knew nothing, but they promised to make inquiries amongst the workmen.

Mr. Fletcher returned from London that night to add to these uncertainties. Completely childish in matters of flesh and blood, he arrived in a condition of helpless grief and panic, and was immediately confined in his room, where he lay in bed feebly lamenting the day that he engaged Wade, and swearing that he would have nothing more to do with a person who could get himself mixed up in

such a horrifying business. This hysteria obliged Miriam to stay in the house as much as she could.

She was glad of the excuse, for while these dreadful doubts assailed her she was afraid to see Antoinette and Charles; afraid and ashamed, for her instincts told her that her surrender to prudence, to suspended judgment, to level-headed admission of evidence, was wrong and wicked.

She envied Antoinette, who with single-minded emphasis had refused to believe in the possibility of Wade's guilt. She did not know that Antoinette, on hearing of the arrest, had turned on her brother and broken into a storm of jealous rage. She did not know that when the storm was spent, quiet, determined Antoinette, with shining eyes and a spot of colour in each pale cheek, her huge handbag clasped under her arm, had set off, against Charles's protestations, to visit the man about whom she had been raging. Nor did Miriam know that Antoinette, careless of the presence of her brother and of a police officer, had taken the prisoner by the hand, drawn him to her, reached up and kissed him on the lips, murmuring, 'Gregory! It isn't true. It isn't true. It is nonsense. You must not worry, for we will get you out.' Nor did Miriam know that the poor dazed fellow had clasped Antoinette in his arms, and broken down and cried, wetting her hair and face with tears of happiness, knowing that he need not assure her of his innocence, and knowing that she understood the whole history of events leading up to this predicament.

Wade wanted Antoinette to keep away, because he feared her name would be linked with his and Josephine's, as the 'other woman' referred to by the detective-inspector. The glory and revelation during that moment when he and Antoinette had clung to each other, had blinded him to the fact that other people were present and that the mischief was done. At the end of the interview, when emotions had subsided, he begged her not to come again, but she scoffed and told him not to talk foolishly, and that as long as he was there she would come each day and bring him some creature comforts. With that she kissed him again and left, followed by Charles who was now more enigmatic and whimsical than ever, but still very reassuring with his gentle handshake and swift, shy glance.

Wade was amazed on the second morning to find that he had slept dreamlessly all night. Waking on his pallet bed in the darkness before dawn, he lay cold and stiff, convulsed by spasms of nervous fear and bouts of nausea. But with all this physical discomfort, his mind soared like a lark rising from a muddy and trampled field. With fine human perverseness, he found himself able to think only of the future; and there was likely to be no future. The past, like the pilgrim Christian's burden, had dropped unperceived off his back, and he stood in his narrow prison cell a free man, relieved of the long-familiar load of resentment, suspicion, anger, and despair.

Antoinette also was happy that morning. Charles went out immediately after the *petit déjeuner*, but she did not fear the solitude in the studio. Knowing that Gregory was to be examined again by the police that morning, she decided that he would be exhausted and hungry after the ordeal. She therefore set about preparing him a picnic lunch which she would take in a basket to La Santé.

She was satisfied that her brothers were doing everything else that could be done, and she did not doubt that they would be successful in persuading the authorities to release the innocent man. She could not have been more sanguine had she known that Charles had gone straight to the cemetery, found the gravediggers, and taken from them an account of Lincoln Farthing's behaviour and strange words by the open grave. This account he delivered to the police, who proceeded to act on it.

It affected the inquiry that morning, and Wade was surprised to find that the questions put to him by the police officials were discreetly coloured with curiosity as to his knowledge of Lincoln Farthing and his views of the man's character. He replied reluctantly, for he did not believe that Farthing was involved. But nevertheless, he returned to his cell much happier, for he knew that Charles had been at work, fighting for him.

He spent another hour alone, lost in a happy day-dream, surrendering himself to the warmth and confidence of this friendship with Charles and Antoinette. He recalled Antoinette's impulsive

kisses, seals of the trust and serenity with which she had approached him since that first day when she bound up his wounded hand. He tried to control his feelings. He must not expect too much. She was an impetuous little person, and it would be easy to abuse her generosity. She was overwrought. Her old friend's death, the tragic aftermath at La Genevraie, and now this affair; no wonder she had let herself go.

But was she so excited? She seemed calm enough when she came yesterday morning and cajoled the authorities until they promised to allow her to bring him a parcel of clean clothes and a lunch-basket to-day. He chuckled over these Frenchmen. Imagine that happening in an English police-station! Imagine an Englishwoman attempting it! The comfort of her matter-of-factness, the serene way in which she ignored all suspicions and incriminative evidence, the candour with which she spoke to him, and touched him with her hands! Was she stupid; did she live merely by her five senses, basking in the sun and turning her back on the cold, the darkness, the uncertainties of life?

He laughed at the absurdity of the question. Antoinette stupid? Those quick, eloquent eyes, the sensitive nostrils, and the mouth alive with humour; the whole figure from head to foot expressive of good taste, originality, and dignity! Yes, how did she combine that unassailable dignity with such a generous freedom? It was miraculous. It

baffled him, confused his old standards and scattered his prejudices.

He sat waiting for her. His longing to see her, to test his new conceptions of her against the warm reality, made him afraid. He must not allow delight to grow and overshadow itself. He must hold himself in check; preserve his mind and nerves to cope with this desperate situation in which his folly had placed him. Folly? Or was it a false, unjustifiable jealousy, which now he was too ashamed to acknowledge. As though he had had any right! Why, what did it mean? That he wanted her for himself, that he was in love with her? But in relation to Antoinette such possessiveness was crude, brutal. It belonged to his old self, the dead, blind self, the puritanical animal demanding a property in another human being's soul and body.

These doubts plunged him into a hell of self-accusation and misery, so deep that the floods of the past came rolling over him again, each billow falling with the sound of the word *failure, failure* ringing in his head. Under this sudden loss of confidence his solitude grew intolerable, and he paced up and down, feverishly looking from time to time at his watch, almost crying aloud with impatience for Antoinette to come so that in the light and health of her presence his self-torturing brain could rest, could leave its thousand accusations unanswered, could be content with that uncertainty because of the joyful certainty that Antoinette, Antoinette was with him.

But the promised time for her to come had passed, and the minutes became leaden. What had happened? Had she lost faith, had someone persuaded her that she must wait until he had cleared himself of this charge of murder? At the end of half an hour he had so worked upon his nerves that he could no longer walk about the cell. He was perspiring and shivering. Hallucinations blackened out his thoughts, and he began to lose coherence. Fantastic images swam before his eyes; the convulsed face of Julius Farthing in that death agony, the full breasts of Josephine Gould lying crushed together with the blood trickling between them; the hot, animal ecstasy of that night when she lay in his arms, laughing in the darkness; the bitter accusations of his wife, her peevishness week after week, the desolate children staring silently as their world of certainty crumbled.

'I can't do this!' he cried aloud, dragging himself up from the bed where he had been lying face downward. He was ashamed, horrified to succumb like this on the brink of happiness.

'I can't do this,' he repeated. And in order to control his nerves and trembling body he set himself back to the wall, and stretched out his arms in the attitude of crucifixion.

After some time this posture, maintained with intense rigidity, became a physical pain that counteracted the mental strain, and he relaxed, gasping, and slid into a sitting position on the floor, with his back to the wall.

'Wait a bit,' he commanded himself. 'She'll come. She'll come.' And in the renewal of that assurance he put his face in his hands and wept refreshing tears, dispelling the hideous fantasies which so treacherously and belatedly had enclosed him.

During this agony of Gregory Wade, his friend Antoinette had been no less distressfully occupied. Busy with her preparations for visiting him, she had telephoned to Wilson and asked him to pack up a parcel of clean linen for Gregory and bring it up to the studio in the car. She learned from him that Mr. Fletcher had returned and was in bed, attended by Miriam, who also, Wilson explained, 'seemed to be taking things pretty sharp-like.' At this moment Antoinette did not offer to speak to Miriam. Some unreason, that could not be explained, informed her that Miriam would only be embarrassed. She did not resent the slight sense of estrangement. She knew where her own loyalty lay; and she was no less sympathetic toward Miriam's share in the general suffering. Perhaps it was this sympathy for the woman whom she admired so much that made her pause before resuming her cooking. She stood for some moments staring thoughtfully at her hands. Then, with a quick shrug of her shoulders, she murmured: 'Poor child; but she has Hilaire,' and returned to the kitchen.

She had hardly resumed work, however, when the bell rang.

'Ah, what is that?' she said, addressing the clock. There was only an hour before she and Charles were due to present themselves at La Santé.

The bell rang again. Wiping her hands on her apron, she hurried through the studio and along the short passage to the door. As she opened it the caller outside rang the bell again, imperatively. The first thing, indeed, that she saw was a large, bony, and freckled wrist, and a mottled hand with finger-nails bitten to the quick.

In that instant, before she opened the door further, a revelation lit up her mind. She knew. The knowledge inspired her with courage. A quick, deep breath, and she stood with the door open, smiling a welcome for Lincoln Farthing.

'Why, Lincoln, where have you been all this time?' she asked, her voice dove-like with innocence, and her eyes concealing their recognition of the change in him. She could *hear* her heart beating steadily, firmly, surely. That was no matter; it was a sign of strength, not fear. She must not let him know she was afraid, *if* she was afraid. But it was pitiful to see him, with that subtle alteration in his appearance. She dare not try now to discover what it was. She must ignore it, push it away.

'Come in,' she said, making way for him. 'You are frozen with the cold.'

She stood against the wall, and he walked past her without removing his hat. Leaving the door open she followed him into the studio and offered

him a chair. He threw his hat into it and remained standing, his hands on his hips and his feet apart.

'You would like some coffee,' said Antoinette, wondering what was to happen next.

He nodded, and she busied herself boiling milk and preparing the coffee. He stood, turning his head to watch her as she worked, until at last she was forced to speak.

'They have been searching for you, Lincoln.'

'Yes, I have been told.' His voice was oddly affected, and Antoinette had the impression that he was talking to himself, rehearsing a part, and that she was only an onlooker.

'Yes,' he continued. 'But they must understand that my time is not yet.'

She stopped, coffee-pot in hand, and turned sharply, staring at him.

'What did you say, Lincoln?'

She recognized the gleam of obstinacy that crossed his face. It was his mother's obstinacy, intensified to such a degree that Antoinette again felt her heart beating. She was afraid. Therefore she smiled at him and put the pot on the table, drew up a chair, and touched his arm.

'Come along, now,' she said, coaxing him. 'You should not have disappeared like that. Let me pour it out for you. You like sugar. Yes, and a *brioche*? They have all been so bothered. There is a lot which cannot be done without you, and——'

'They must be patient,' he said, opening his bloodshot eyes and staring over her head. He had not looked directly at her since he entered. If only he would do so, she knew that she might persuade him, calm him. But he was wilful, filled with guile, wary as a wild animal. He would accept no challenge. She must be content to wait, for sooner or later he would drop back, betray a momentary helplessness that would break down his posture. He had always done so in the past.

'Of course, Lincoln,' she said, putting the coffee and a plate on the table before the empty chair which he had ignored. 'These matters can never be hurried.'

'No,' he said.

Then, without her being prepared, he looked at her. This was her opportunity and she stared into the dilated pupils of his eyes. They were dark and hollow, like the windows of an empty house. She had a sensation of being alone, and when he spoke again she started, as though an impersonal voice were addressing her out of the void.

'Listen, Toni, there are other things to be done before I can declare myself.'

Declare himself? What, was he going to admit something? Was her knowledge, her intuition to be confirmed so easily? But he was speaking still, and she must not lag behind. His voice was more human now. It trembled recognizably. This was Lincoln Farthing speaking.

'That is why I have come to see you first,

Antoinette. Because of that—that mistaken night. That was not true. You know that. You know that!’ His eyes burned again with this obstinate fire that shut him off from the world.

She tried to say that she had forgotten the incident; but the lie was too big for her, and while she hesitated he spoke again.

‘Things are different now. I know what I have to do. My destiny. And that must be fulfilled, for the salvation of France.’

He had returned to that strange, uplifted intonation. He was half smiling, like a man looking into a mirror, slightly afraid, slightly contemptuous.

‘You are the daughter of France. You are a child of her purest blood. That is why I have come back. But as something more. And I can prove it, *prove it!*’

His voice broke at the reiteration.

‘Prove what?’

Antoinette spoke because she must test her power of self-control. She knew that she must not give way to this growing fear.

‘I can now come back and ask you. The Son of France. Do you recognize that? I can ask you to marry the Son of France. Because I have proved my power!’

Antoinette tried not to lose her grip on the moment. She must hear all he said; be able to recollect it. And now she must urge him on. This vagueness was not what she wanted.

‘To marry?’ she said coldly. ‘That needs very

big proof.' She turned to walk away, back to her cooking. 'Whom am I to marry?'

The ruse succeeded. He stepped after her, seized her by the arm, and forced her to turn round and face him. But even so, he did not look into her face. He was staring beyond her, into his own wilful world.

'And when we are married,' he said, 'I shall declare myself, and begin the work in earnest. France must be cleared. I have already begun. I have already begun. There is one parasite less to-day. Do you hear that, Toni? I have ridded France of one.' Then he laughed, a high, giggling titter, as though he were looking at an indecent picture. 'Yes, and I have proved my manhood, too. On that woman who was so proud of her power over men. That woman who dragged them after her. *I know! I know!*'

He tittered again, and put his hands on Antoinette's shoulders. She might have shrieked, had she not seen that Charles and a stranger were standing on the threshold, watching. She did not look at them. She only nodded her head several times, very gravely, and put up her arms, clasping Lincoln ecstatically. 'Yes! Yes! Then tell me, *chéri*, tell me what you did to prove it. Tell me!'

She saw Charles take the stranger by the sleeve and draw him back behind the curtain.

'Ah, yes,' said Lincoln, patting her on the shoulders, 'France is better without such vermin. I had to punish her. So. See, I had to do it.'

*After I had proved what you needed me to prove, Toni. It is all right now, quite sure, now.'*

'Well, Lincoln, you know we must think it over. Ah! Here is Charles. Let us call a family council at once, for they will all have to be consulted. A French marriage—and especially now, Lincoln. Charles! Charles!'

She was calm, calling her brother, raising her voice only a little as though she were calling him to coffee.

He came into the room alone, and nodded his head. She knew that the stranger had gone, carrying away the necessary evidence.

'Chéri,' said Antoinette, turning from Lincoln Farthing and greeting her brother with a kiss, 'Lincoln proposes a marriage in our family. We must call them all together, eh?'

Charles put his arms round her and feigned surprise. He looked up shyly at Lincoln Farthing and smiled, then held out his hand. Lincoln took it, self-consciously, but did not speak.

'Let us all go then,' said Charles. 'I'll summon my father and my brothers to the Hôtel de Vaudrac, our ancestral house. Hilaire, indeed, is already there. Wilson is here with the car, so we can go at once.'

Still with his arm round Antoinette, who was quietly weeping, he prepared to lead the way. As he was leading his sister out, he looked over his shoulder at Lincoln, who was following.

'What do you think?' he said. 'They have

taken the Englishman, Wade. They think it is a *crime passionnel*.' He laughed good-humouredly. 'And all the time—all the time, it was a political act—*your* political act, eh, Lincoln?'

And Farthing nodded his proud assent, and walked on as Charles and Antoinette drew aside and allowed him to precede them to the regal Daimler, which stood waiting, with Wilson at attention holding the door open.

As they followed, Charles whispered to his sister: 'I have sent the officer on. He will be waiting there. Wilson can go and fetch Gregory, eh, Toni?'

And he almost raised his eyes to look into hers. But instead, he lifted her hand and kissed it shyly.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### ARRANGING PARTNERSHIPS

AFTER Wade had reassured himself that Antoinette would come, he sat almost contentedly watching the passage of the minutes. His mind, cleared by the storm, ranged fearlessly, exploring all the events, feelings, and follies of the past few weeks. Whatever might happen, he was once more master of himself, and therefore a good servant of mankind. He had gained immeasurably, even though it might be his fate to lose everything.

Sitting quietly at the table in his cell, he passed

beyond self-speculation, the weighing of his assets and losses, the probings into his own state. He wanted to get out to look at the streets again, to talk to people, to enjoy the movement, growth, surprises of the world. He wanted to do something. If only Antoinette would come he could talk to her about it. She had a capacity for understanding every kind of creative restlessness. And now, though he was calm, patient, resigned, he was also urgently restless, itching to be up and doing, testing his new strength.

His new strength. That was a miracle which had not yet been explained. Maybe it would never be explained. He could only trace the history of its growth. His imagination settled on that first meeting with Charles de Vaudrac: the scene in the rain, the swinging lantern held by the peasant, and the moment when the little Frenchman appeared at the cottage door and lifted his eyes to meet those of the Englishman who had thrown a mackintosh round the stranger's shoulders to protect his dinner-jacket from the downpour.

And then Miriam with her confidence, her astringent criticism, her assumption that he was sane and healthy and normal, that he would be willing to co-operate in her plans.

But had they not all met him on that assumption? Hilaire, Josephine, had not they accepted him as a fully responsible human being, giving him respect and even deference? Josephine, indeed, had given him more. How much more? It was

fruitless to ask now. He was not ashamed of what he had done. He was willing to tell Antoinette all about it; to exchange confidences with her—or to say nothing! Say nothing; that would be more mature, more dignified. Why talk so much? She was not likely to want assurances. That was the joy, the glory of their friendship. She asked for no guarantees, demanded no promises—and gave none.

And as a result—but before he could enjoy the contemplation of this result, he heard footsteps in the corridor, and he rose, leaning with his fingertips on the table, expectant.

He heard the key turn in the lock; he watched the door swing open, and he saw Wilson! Antoinette had not come. Even so his mind remained clear. It had discovered a strength that could resist attack.

‘Well, Wilson,’ he said smiling. ‘Any further news?’

Wilson’s face was white with excitement.

‘News?’ he said, huskily. ‘Oh, no, sir, I haven’t got any news. I’ve only got my job to do, that’s all.’ And he turned to the police officials who had followed him into the cell. ‘These gentlemen will explain.’

He stood grinning while one of the officers advanced, shook hands with Wade, and explained that the cause of Madame Gould’s death had been ascertained. He congratulated Monsieur Wade, apologized for the unavoidable detention, and said

that the British Consul had at once been informed over the telephone. This last item of news, to which the officer attached so much importance, Wade received gravely, bowing as he thanked the officer for this final courtesy.

After a few other formalities and signings of papers, another officer handed Wade his pocket-book and the wrist-watch marked with his initials. Then everybody waited for him to lead the way to freedom.

Instead, he stood with the booklet and the watch in his hand, staring at them. The leather cover of the book smelled of jasmine—Josephine's perfume. He felt her hands tighten on his shoulders; the flexion of her muscles as he grasped her wrists.

'No, no!' he muttered, overcome, afraid to recollect more of the intimacies of that night. But no, he was not afraid. He was humbly and deeply grateful.

'Thank you, José,' he said, lifting the watch to his lips. And when he recovered and looked up, he found that the two police officers who had been in touch with him since his arrest had turned aside, and that one of them was violently blowing his nose.

'Thank you, gentlemen,' said Wade, and walked out with Wilson, who led him to the car, tucked a rug round him, and after hesitating, huskily muttered: 'That's all right, sir,' and shut the door.

Gregory found all his friends assembled to meet him at the Hôtel de Vaudrac. As the car drew up, Hilaire ran down the steps, flung open the door

and embraced the figure who was about to descend.

'Ah! Mon ami!' he cried, unashamed of the tears rolling down his fat cheeks. And with his arm round the prodigal's shoulders he led him into the house, where Miriam Fletcher stood at the threshold, paler even than usual, smiling gravely and sadly.

She hesitated as Wade approached her, but he took her gently by the hand, and some quality in his touch reassured her. She raised her head, and looked at him, surprised by the sense of calm and happiness.

'Why——?' she began, half incredulous.

'Why not?' he said; 'and thank *you*, Miss Fletcher, thank *you*.'

She turned to Hilaire, still perplexed, and muttered:

'That's hardly fair, is it?'

She wanted to blot out the memory of those dreadful half-suspicious. She wanted to free herself of the accusations of folly. The picture of Lincoln Farthing leaving in the custody of the police still unnerved her. She saw the familiar yet unfamiliar figure, subtly and evilly changed, with its crazy mantle of dignity, entering the house and staring from one to the other: herself, Hilaire, Charles, Antoinette. She recalled the unpleasant deception, the fantastic play-acting, the too-easy persuasion as the poor self-crowned Son of France was induced to follow the officers to their car.

'No,' she repeated more sanely, 'that's hardly fair.' And still further reassured by the touch of Wade's hand, she smiled, leaned forward, and kissed him on the cheek. 'Let *me* thank *you*.'

Before they could disentangle themselves from this happy embarrassment, Hilaire put an arm round each and urged them into the library, where Charles, his father the Comte de Vaudrac, and his eldest brother Edmond, stood waiting, an apprehensive deputation.

Edmond unbent, and followed the greetings and congratulations with the preliminaries of a set speech. Hilaire's patience, however, gave out at this point, and clapping his brother heartily on the back, he cried:

'Listen, Edmond. Father—I want your blessing. After all these miseries—well, Miriam and I have decided to strengthen our position. We shall marry as soon as it can decently be arranged, isn't that so, *chérie*?'

He looked down at Miriam, who now stood by his side, serene once more.

'I think that would be a good arrangement,' she said, so gravely that he broke into a peal of laughter whose heartiness caused his elder brother to frown with disapproval.

The Comte, however, advanced, and ceremoniously kissed Miriam first on one cheek, then on the other.

'It will be a good alliance,' he said. 'Our families——' and with a gesture he indicated the

unbroken lines through the centuries. 'I must see your father and discuss the matter before he goes.'

'Goes?' Wade broke in, dismayed by the news.

'Yes,' said Miriam, 'father is in bed. He is really in a bad, nervous state, and refuses to stay in France. As soon as he can travel he will return to America.'

'Oh, I see,' said Wade, thinking rapidly about this change in his own position. But before he was able to sort out his relief from his apprehensions, Miriam spoke again.

'Yes, you will be free now, Gregory—and able to take up your own work, your *real* work—if you want to.'

Wade knew that Charles was looking at him, waiting for him. He caught the fall of that quick glance; but it was assurance enough.

'Yes, I want to,' he said to Miriam, with quiet emphasis. 'And—and I'm sure everything will turn out all right with you—and your partner!' He smiled, and was about to walk over to Charles, when Antoinette entered the room.

She looked at the group, singled out Gregory, and spoke to him as she approached and took him by the arm and the lapel of his coat.

'Mon Dieu!' she said, 'so you are back already. I have prepared a bath, and you must hurry, for lunch is already late, and father hates that. Come now!'

She smiled at Miriam and touched her hand as she passed, leading Gregory to the door. 'Father, we

shall not be long. You must be patient. Miriam will bring some sherry.'

Wade found himself walking up the stairs beside her, still with her hand on his arm.

'You thought I wasn't coming, Gregory?' she asked, as they entered the bathroom. 'Come now, we must hurry.' And she busied herself unknotting his tie, unbuttoning his clothes, helping him to slip off his soiled and slept-in underclothes, urging him naked into the bath and scrubbing his back and shoulders.

Gregory had so much to say that he was dumb, bemused by his own happiness. He submitted to her ministration, and half-listened to her as she chattered. It was enough to be in her hands.

As he was pulling on his clean clothes and a pressed suit, he stopped for her to button up his shirt.

'So there is to be a marriage in your family,' he said.

'Yes,' she replied, nodding her head. He watched the light flash on her sleek hair. He looked down at her curved cheek, her rounded arm, with its minute hairs gleaming wet. 'Yes, they will be happy. They have always been good friends.'

Some quality, perhaps intentional, in her voice made him stoop and kiss her in the white parting of her hair. He felt her stop, her whole body arrested; then quickly with a little laugh of pure happiness, she put her hands over his ears, reached up, and kissed him on the throat.

'Oh!' she cried, 'you have forgotten to powder!' And she sprinkled talcum into the palm of her hand and dabbed it over his cheeks and neck, smoothing it with her fingers.

'They've taken him away,' she said, picking up the collar and fastening it at the back of his shirt.

'Lincoln Farthing?'

'Yes; he came to the studio, and told me what he had done. He wanted to marry me.'

Gregory looked down at her again, as she struggled with the front stud.

'Poor devil,' he said, 'life didn't give him a chance.'

With that, he found Antoinette crying in his arms, clinging to him in a convulsion of fear, murmuring 'No, no, Gregory! Impossible! Impossible!'

Comforting her, he tried to be calm and matter-of-fact.

'It was all impossible, Toni, all of it. But there it is. We must go on with things. I want to now. I want to work now, Toni. Can't we do that together?'

He shook her gently, urging the question. She looked up, calm again, and before replying she brushed a little powder off his tie, as she handed it to him.

'*That* is not impossible,' she cried.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

## NEW SELF

SINCE Mr. Fletcher refused to stay in France, the marriage of Miriam and Hilaire was hastened in order that he could be present. He left a few days after, still having refused to see Wade. His only concession was to give his secretary six months' salary in lieu of notice. This enabled Wade to live independently through the winter while he worked with Charles on the alterations and decoration of the premises in the Boulevard des Italiens. During the course of this work, a director of one of the big multiple stores approached Hilaire and inquired about the architect, with the result that Wade found himself commissioned to add a story to the already gigantic building near the Place de l'Opéra. He accepted the commission on the condition that Charles should be given the decoration.

As the de Vaudracs were unable to let the town house, Hilaire and Miriam decided to live there, and they offered Wade hospitality which he did not hesitate to accept. Wilson became a permanent member of the household, as the Daimler, one of Mr. Fletcher's wedding presents to Miriam, needed a keeper.

Gregory and Charles found their partnership of labour very fruitful. At first each was appre-

hensive of encroaching on the other's field; but with increasing practice they began to share ideas, inspirations, and difficulties, and their work gradually assumed a character of its own, a composite of the two personalities, which quickly attracted notice.

By the end of the winter the shop in the Boulevard des Italiens was almost finished, and was the subject of an article in one of the important technical magazines. The second commission was well in hand, and a third had been accepted. This was the building of a large country villa in the south of France, at Banyuls-sur-Mer, near the Spanish frontier.

At the end of March the active partners were able to give their attention to this job, and they held a council of action at dinner one night with Hilaire, Miriam, and Antoinette. In the course of the discussion Hilaire discovered that nobody had relaxed from work during the whole of the winter. He and Miriam had not even indulged in a honeymoon. After the death of Josephine, and the vanishing of Lincoln Farthing into an asylum, the survivors of the tragedy had perhaps exaggerated their desire to look forward, to live intensely in the present and the future. They had been afraid of idleness.

But the passage of time, with work and a tonic element of success, had eased the tension. Therefore, when Hilaire suggested that they should make up a holiday party to visit the site of the new job,

and to consult with the client, an hotel-keeper in Barcelona, Miriam and Antoinette joyfully agreed.

A fortnight later the party set forth in the Daimler. They took the journey easily, spending three days on the road, giving up their minds and hearts and bodies, surrendering themselves to the time-free anonymity of travel, passing through the lands whose hills, outcropping rocks, vineyards, farms, rivers, spindly tufted trees, create the same setting as that which supplied the backgrounds of the medieval painters, and of the songs of the *trouvères*. The peace, the changelessness, the divine monotony, completed the restoration begun by the long winter of work.

Hilaire and Miriam left the others at Banyuls, and went on further south into Spain, returning a month later to pick them up on the journey home. During that time Wade and Charles not only proceeded with their commission, but also secured, through the enthusiasm of their client, a much bigger job of converting into a modern residence one of the ruined fortress castles built by Vauban for Louis XIV. The new client was a millionaire wine-merchant from Perpignan, ambitious to live like a thirteenth-century baron on a hill-top, with bastions, terraces, a rocky winding road, and a humble village beneath his domain. He also wanted modern American plumbing, a swimming bath, central heating and electric installation. The architect and the decorator were given only the stone shell of the old fortress. They had to remake

the building, and supply the terraces, the bastions, the road up from the village. The task would take them at least two years.

With these commissions on hand, Wade returned to Paris to find that during his absence the article in the technical paper had brought other inquiries. Almost overnight he was now a busy professional man, in urgent need of an office, a secretary, and a staff of draughtsmen.

On a warm evening in May, he sat alone in the library of the Hôtel de Vaudrac. He had been indoors all day, working on his drawings, and he resolved to do less of this spade-work. He was making enough money now to be able to employ other people and to keep his own energy for the creative labour. Yes, he was making money again; and Charles, too. It had been a surprising and fruitful winter and a happy one, in spite of the shadows, the aftermath of the autumn tragedies.

In this evening pause between one busy day and another he could look back, recalling the gradual establishment of a routine with Charles—and Antoinette. Antoinette: she had come so unceremoniously into his life, and now he wondered what was to be done about it. His debts in England were settled, and his first wife was at last satisfied, her second marriage having proved to be more successful than she had expected. She had even agreed that some time or other the two boys should spend a holiday with their father.

Well, it was so. He looked back without resent-

ment. He had loved her; but that was when he was young, and sick in body and mind. And in youth or in sickness, love makes an easy anchorage.

He pondered over these matters, asking himself what love was. He had known marriage. He had been to Josephine and had received some pagan reinvigoration which he could not name. And now here he sat, a stranger, a happy man eager for new labours, putting out a steady hand and once more plucking the fruit of life.

He could sit still and enjoy idleness. That was an almost forgotten experience! The peace of God, which passeth all understanding. Sitting for a few further minutes, contemplating these words, he found himself curious to return to reading. So keen was the impulse, that he stood up, walked to the window, and looked up into the evening sky shining behind an almond tree in flower.

‘Yes,’ he said aloud, ‘I’ll re-read the *Divine Comedy*. I’ll begin——’

But another thought silenced him. He would go and talk to Antoinette about this question of getting an office. He had not seen her for two days; and that was an unusually long absence.

Following the thought, he yielded himself to deeper impulses, and rang for Wilson.

‘Look here, Wilson,’ he said, ‘will you be wanted to-night—or possibly for a day or two? Is the car ready for a trip immediately after dinner?’

‘No, sir, they’re staying at the flat to-night. It’s handy after the opera.’

‘Well, get your supper and then bring the car up to the studio. We may want to drive down to La Genevraie.’

He seized Wilson by the arm.

‘I hope we shall, Wilson. I hope we shall!’

Wilson looked at the thin eager face, the shining eyes and said dryly:

‘I ’m always ready for a run, sir.’

Fired with this still only half-conscious purpose, Wade hurried to the studio in the Rue Aumont-Thiéville. He knocked so loudly that Antoinette came running to the door. He heard her quick footsteps.

‘Toni!’ he said, as she stood staring at him, astonished by his agitation.

‘Well, Gregory,’ she said severely, as though disapproving the excitement in his voice.

‘I want to ask you something! Toni, will you come for a drive to-night? It is this! I ’ve been seized with an impulse to take you there—do you understand?’

‘Take me where?’ she asked, drawing him into the narrow passage and shutting the door.

‘I want to take you to La Genevraie, to talk to you there—to—to——’

But Antoinette put up her hands to stop him—and a moment later hid her face in them, crying ‘No! Gregory. We ’ve not been there since! It will be desolate, heartbreaking—I——’

‘But I want to break that spell. I want to test our new strength, Toni. I want to take you there

to find happiness, to ask you to marry me—do you hear that, to marry me, Toni!’

She raised her face from her hands and looked steadily at him.

‘To *marry* you, Gregory?’ she said, slowly articulating each word. He watched the conflict of feelings in her eyes, waiting confidently until she put out her hands to him and said without a smile: ‘Yes; I will come with you to hear that.’

